

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

SANTINIKETAN  
VISWA BHARATI  
LIBRARY

822.34

S 24





# **CHARACTER PROBLEMS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**





# CHARACTER PROBLEMS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

A GUIDE TO THE BETTER UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE DRAMATIST

BY

LEVIN L. SCHÜCKING

PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF Breslau

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
LONDON      CALCUTTA      SYDNEY

*First published July 1922*  
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
2 & 3 Portsmouth Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2

---

*Printed in Great Britain at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS by*  
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & CO. LTD.  
Colchester, London & Eton

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION : THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS ON SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS	7
1. Choice of plot. 2. Collaboration. 3. Anonymity. 4. The rise of individualism. 5. Shakespeare's attitude toward the public. 6. Older dramatic forms in his work. 7. The anachronisms. 8. The clown. 9. Conclusions.	
I. DIRECT SELF-EXPLANATION	29
1. The relations between actors and audience. 2. Self-explanation in harmony with the character. 3. Ambiguous self-explanation.	
II. THE REFLECTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE MINDS OF OTHER PERSONS	53
1. The reflection of the characters in harmony with the real character of the speaker. 2. Misleading reflection of characters. The villains' description of the heroes. 3. The question of a subjective element in the reflection of characters in other minds.	
III. CHARACTER AND EXPRESSION	87
1. Harmony maintained throughout the play. 2. Lack of harmony. 3. Detached scenes and inserted episodes.	
IV. CHARACTER AND ACTION	111
1. Independence of the scenes. 2. Tendency to episodic intensification. 3. Different conceptions of the same character in different scenes. 4. Parts of the original historical action not assimilated. 5. The filling in of the given outline of the action. 6. Action adjusted to the development of character. 7. The general causes of disagreement between character and action.	

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

V. MOTIVES FOR ACTION	203
1. Motives explicitly stated. 2. Imputed motives.	
VI. THE QUESTION OF SYMBOLICAL CHARACTERS	237
1. The characters in <i>The Tempest</i> . 2. The alleged symbolism.	
INDEX OF CHARACTERS	267
INDEX OF NAMES	269

# CHARACTER PROBLEMS IN: SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

## INTRODUCTION

### THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS ON SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

**W**ITH the exception of Dante, no poet in the whole of European literature has called forth so vast a bulk of explanatory comment as Shakespeare. Innumerable are the diverse views that have been put forward of the characters, the action, the purpose of his plays. Irreconcilable, too, are the differences of opinion that have arisen as to the true interpretation of his characters. Many have sought in vain to wrest his secret from him—many a one, like Schiller, has contented himself, after ardent toil, with the conclusion that he is hidden behind his works as God is hidden behind His creation; not a few have fashioned for themselves a god after their own image. This subjective interpretation has triumphed: even those who regarded its conclusions with misgiving were incapable of finding any other point of view. In his masterly book on Shakespeare (1909) Sir Walter Raleigh says that even good critics often permit themselves the dangerous assumption that Shakespeare's meaning is not easily recognized, and must be ascertained by a subtle process of digging out all sorts of hidden significations. Yet, he says, each play makes a distinct and immediate impression by which it should be judged; "the impression is the play." Unfortunately, however, the essential point is overlooked here, that the impression itself varies according to the peculiar character of each reader. The question arises whether it is not possible

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to stem, to a certain extent, this subjective current in the contemplation of Shakespeare. This is certainly feasible as soon as we have abandoned an obviously false point of view such as appears in the effort, peculiar to the exegesis of Shakespeare since the Romantic movement, to make his art as palatable as may be by reading into it as much of modern thought and feeling as possible. In this way the interpretation of Shakespeare has strayed into hopelessly wrong paths; for the point is not to find the most beautiful—i.e. the most modern—interpretation, but the one which is most probably true. We can arrive at that only by asking ourselves: What was the probable attitude of Shakespeare's contemporaries to such questions?

Looked at from this standpoint, things seem to change their aspect. At first sight, it is true, the ambiguity of his art appears more wonderful than ever. This is not what we usually find in the dramatic art of earlier centuries. What disturbs us in a play like Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* or Sheridan's *Rivals* is rather their extreme obviousness. We are almost inclined to be annoyed at the low estimate of our intelligence implied by the perpetual explanatory 'asides' in old plays like these. What, then, is the cause of the difficulties existing in Shakespeare's still older art? We might imagine that they originate in the fact that their author was an individualist working only for a small circle, a poet of absolute mental independence, who refused to consider the demands of the time and was not compelled to embody his thoughts in the most transparent form. We might regard him as a writer who, certain of not being rejected if he became obscure and unintelligible, addressed himself to a small and select audience who were accustomed to intellectual exercises, familiar with all kinds of subtle disquisitions, trained to read between the lines, and quick to catch the faintest undercurrent of thought—rejoicing, like an Ibsen audience of our own day, whenever "the Master offered them another nut to crack." But though almost nine-tenths of the interpretations of Shakespeare are based on the assumption of such a poet and such an audience, conscientious historical research shows

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

us that a view of this kind is in direct contradiction to the real facts. In the first place, the individuality of the poet in that time was allowed far less free play than in later centuries.

1. CHOICE OF PLOT.—Until quite recently the generally accepted point of view has been that Shakespeare conceived and created his plays in the same manner as modern playwrights do theirs. Even Brandes seems to imagine that his choice of certain subjects was principally conditioned by personal experience or by the suggestions derived from stories he had read. It is true that we are by no means acquainted with the genesis of all Shakespeare's dramas, and there is good reason to think that it was not the same in every case; still, we may take it for granted that our modern demand that the inspiration of the artist's work must be looked for in his own innermost experience was almost unknown in the Elizabethan era.

The truth seems rather to be that there existed keen competition between the different theatres for the favour of the public, whose interest is always chiefly centred in the plot of a play, so that a piece which 'draws' in one theatre is sure to be imitated by others. The situation was not very different from that of the cinemas of our day, for when a 'Cleopatra' film is produced in one picture-house of a town the others are sure to follow suit, and each brings out its own 'Cleopatra.' Shakespeare's theatrical company was no exception to the others, except that "the Lord Chamberlain's servants"—later, King James's own company—as being the most respectable, after the manner of royal theatres showed themselves somewhat more conservative and cautious than the others. It is, however, perfectly evident that a drama like *Richard III* was only one among many which treated of that great criminal, while the Merchant of Venice was clearly meant to compete with his near relative, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. The story of *Troilus and Cressida*, at the time when Shakespeare used it (1601-2), had already proved very popular, and *Hamlet* was surely intended to meet the taste of a public whose interest in a new form of the



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

'revenge-tragedy' had just been revived. In these matters we can discern a franker endeavour to make concessions to the public than is customary to-day. The little stress laid on the individuality of an author may be seen in another sign of the times, the habit of collaboration.

2. COLLABORATION.—It was quite common at that time for authors to collaborate in a play, much as to-day men collaborate on a newspaper. The extant manuscript of the play of *Sir Thomas More*, which originated in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when a change had already begun to take place in the state of things just described, yet shows the handwriting of at least five clearly distinct collaborators. I have later on endeavoured to make clear how this must affect the technique of the composition. But more than the mere technical side of drama is involved here. Where more than half a dozen are employed in creating a dramatic work, not much elbow-room remains to the individual worker. We should therefore be inclined to wonder that this tradition could continue so long did we not perceive how nearly connected this art is with the art of the Middle Ages, which was so often the result of the united efforts of many anonymous workers. Strangely enough, the reformers and individualists of the time who set their backs against tradition submitted to this custom. Even Ben Jonson, the dramatist, altered the printed edition of his chief work, *Sejanus*, by omitting in it several passages written by another hand in the stage version. It is, we must confess, difficult to conceive why the system of collaboration was so long retained in that very field where, according to our idea, "the strong man is mightiest alone." As is well known, the great Dutch painters often worked together on the same picture, one who had specialized in landscape putting in the background, while the figure-painter contributed the figures of men or animals. A similar theory has been put forward to explain certain collaborations in Shakespeare's time,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Wann, *The Collaboration of Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger* (Univ. of Wisconsin Shakespeare Studies), Madison, 1916. For the whole question see Creizenach, *Geschichte des Neueren Dramas*, vol. iv, p. 76 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

but it is certain that the difficulties of this problem are not to be solved by a single formula of this kind.

It is true people have sought to exclude Shakespeare from a practice which, as may be proved, was almost-universally employed by his contemporaries. German research, in particular, has refused to accept the results of a criticism based to a large extent on the dictates of artistic judgment and a feeling for style instead of on strict tests. But in a field of research like this it is very difficult to discover any safer guide, and, considering the facts of the case, fairly good external evidence has been found to support the observations which it will never be possible to free from every trace of subjectivity. Thus we are enabled to say that Shakespeare's collaboration with others in the three parts of *Henry VI*, if not also in *Titus Andronicus*, may be looked upon as highly probable.

But also in later dramas we seem to observe here and there in the texture of dramatic speech the rich stuff of Shakespeare's metaphors woven into the simpler home-made linen of other workshops. Undoubtedly we must in many cases allow for the possible use of older dramatic versions, for it was characteristic more especially of the earlier period of the Elizabethan drama that a work became remoulded, added to, and completed in its passage from one hand to another.

3. ANONYMITY.—This work of collaboration was rendered easier and more practicable by the literary anonymity customary at the time. In attempting to interpret Shakespeare rightly, we must make it clear to ourselves that his art, unlike Goethe's or Ibsen's, does not follow a course prescribed by its own limits, but is merely one mighty wave forming part of a great river. The popular theatre, for which he wrote, arises out of an anonymous obscurity, like the cinematograph of our days. It is born of the people and suffers from the want of curiosity on the part of the uneducated and the children as to the question of authorship. The most valuable parts of the mystery-plays have been handed down to us as anonymous. We are unacquainted with the name of the man who in his splendid

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

delineation of Cain as a surly miser, in the "Towneley Mysteries," displays more talent than almost all the contemporary poets who essayed to put Pegasus through his paces amid the general applause of the Court patrons in the arena of recognized literature. We do not know who the poet was who in the deeply moving mystery of *Abraham and Isaac* displays such depth and fineness of feeling, nor the author or adapter of the newly revived morality-play of *Everyman*, two pieces which might almost make pre-Shakespeareans of us, just as the tenderness and simplicity of the primitive painters created the Pre-Raphaelites. Shakespeare himself and his immediate predecessors are the direct heirs of this anonymous Cinderella of literature. The greater part of the pieces which he saw played in his youth by strolling players in Stratford—farces, worthless interludes, moralities still loved by the people in the sixteenth century—bore no special author's name. There was thus not much space for the development of literary ambition in this sphere. But the condition of things was somewhat different where, as at Court, an educated audience was more critical in its demands, and at the same time displayed an interest in certain persons as poets. The influence emanating from this quarter, therefore, must not be undervalued. Then, too, came the extraordinary development of the London theatres, the improvement in acting and scenery, a growing interest on the part of the public, so that the once so despised comedians began to attract dramatic authors who had to write up-to-date plays for them. These were originally not people moving in circles favourable to the development of pure literature; they were, if not actually actors, often failures, or wrecks of men, displeasing to the honest citizen, suspected of the police, Bohemians, in fact, of doubtful repute and questionable calling. But shipwrecked students as they often were, they had imbibed the mental training and culture of their time, which was invaluable for the theatre, and occasionally, like Peele, drifting from the stage of the university to that of the Court, and finally to the popular theatre, they everywhere acquired artistic inspiration for use later on.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

But none of their various writings was originally intended for print; as in the Middle Ages, the author still remains hidden behind his work, and, just as in our days in the cinema, the exact title of a piece was probably unknown to many of the audience in Shakespeare's time and very few were familiar with the name of the author.<sup>1</sup> Certain entries made in diaries which now form our chief authority for the dates of certain plays are equally instructive. Thus Manningham, the lawyer, writes on February 2, 1601, "At our festival we had a play called *Twelfth Night, or What you Will*," and notes the things in it that impressed him most, but it is significant that the writer, a very well educated man of literary tastes, takes no interest whatever in the name of the author. It is precisely the same case with the diary of Dr Simon Forman when he writes out the plot of *Macbeth*, which he had seen at the Globe Theatre. The same thing may be observed in the catalogues of books. The poet Drummond of Hawthornden in drawing up a list of his books enters the names of his plays, among them three by Shakespeare, without mentioning the name of their authors, a thing quite contrary to his usual practice. It is thus no mere accident that none of the names of the authors who wrote the primitive earlier works used by Shakespeare has been handed down to us. The most discriminating researches were required to prove that *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was probably the most influential of all pre-Shakespearean dramas, was the work of the poet Thomas Kyd, whose name had long since sunk into oblivion. This state of things naturally created much bitterness among the playwrights of those days. The public is never over-grateful to its benefactors. The man who devoted himself to high-class literature enjoyed at least the prospect of finding a patron among the aristocracy and of being preserved from starvation. But the popular dramatist was not so well off. His works were accepted by a theatre for a miserable sum, and

<sup>1</sup> When the 'Engrossing Clerk' of the Revels Office had to draw up a very carefully written list of the several plays acted before King James at Whitehall in the winter of 1604-5 he spelled the name of the author of *Hamlet* 'Shaxberd.'

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

he was perhaps granted a single benefit performance, but he retained no further rights. Hence the embittered playwrights not unfrequently direct their wrath at their employers, and Greene, one of the most productive of them all, even died with a curse at the actors on his lips. This very curse, full of inexpressible bitterness, happens to be the first mention we find of Shakespeare, who is referred to as "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers." In later centuries we have seen the successful dramatist surrounded by a crowd of admirers and made the lion of the hour, but at the end of the sixteenth century this was only the case to a very limited degree.

4. THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM.—The effect of such a condition of things on individual freedom of action is obvious. It has to yield absolutely to public opinion; against this it is often impossible to attempt any resistance, even on the most important points. If in the nineteenth century Ibsen, a fanatic for individualism, was obliged at the first performance of *A Doll's House* to make the preposterous concession to the public of allowing his heroine to return to her 'doll's house,' what could we expect of a playwright living at a time when the individual was hampered by a thousand fetters and menaced by a much stronger resistance than that of mere tradition? Faust's complaint,

Das beste, was du wissen kannst  
Darfst du den Buben doch nicht sagen,

may aptly be applied to the dramatic activity of the more advanced spirits of that time.

Marlowe is an instructive example of this. What we know of him is enough to assure us that he was a bold, critical mind, unfettered by any dogma or tradition. When this man adapted the folk-tale of Dr Faustus, certainly attracted to it by that feeling of intellectual affinity and sympathy with the subject which alone ensures poetic success, he imparted to his hero an audacity of speculation almost amounting to criminality which, as we may assume from external evidence, was a vital part of his own nature. The idea of selling one's soul to the devil, which made even

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

the most daring spirits of that time tremble in their innermost hearts, had no terror for this man of violent passions. "Had I as many souls as there be stars, I'd give them all for Mephistopheles," he exclaims. This unheard-of blasphemy must have caused shivers of horror to his audience, and impressed on them the certainty of a frightful end for such an evildoer. And the poet by no means disappoints his hearers, for his Titan finally shrinks to something so pitifully small that even the most pious man in the pit must have been satisfied. As the hour approaches in which his pact must be fulfilled, we find him whimpering and cowering under the burden of his sins, convulsed with fear at his approaching end. But it would be a complete misunderstanding of the poet's purpose to suppose that this represents Marlowe's personal point of view. *His own individual conception can and must find expression only within the limits of public opinion*; the rest he keeps to himself. In the same way we must regard the problem presented to us in *The Merchant of Venice*. In those days no one would have thought of challenging current opinion with a play embodying a serious thesis, any more than one would do it in a cinema-theatre to-day. If people argue that the treatment of the character of Shylock is an attempt of this nature they misinterpret not only the text, but likewise the prevailing social conditions of the theatre, just as those overrate the freedom of thought of the Elizabethan stage who read into the play of *Richard II* all sorts of ideas which would have been considered revolutionary at that time (Ulrici).

It is true that just during Shakespeare's period of production a certain important change took place in this condition of things, and, what is most significant from a sociological standpoint, toward the middle of his dramatic career the relations of the poet to the public underwent a remarkable alteration. A social revolution which had long before invaded other departments of art—e.g., architecture—also begins to take place in the drama: individual personages struggle out of the anonymous obscurity of theatrical art, cultivating more assiduously their artistic

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

personality, laying stress on the independence of their own performances to the very last letter, and even making a determined stand against the past by securing the admission of the drama into the field of literature proper. This movement is aided on the one hand by the inestimable efforts and personal propaganda of Ben Jonson; on the other by the evident rise in the social status of the dramatic author.

The men who toward the end of the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the next devote themselves to the theatre, like Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, Tourneur, etc., are no longer mere wrecks, or Bohemians, as they had been ten years before, at the beginning of Shakespeare's career, but for the greater part the sons of good families, who occasionally return to their former professions, military or civilian. Such a change, of course, has its influence on the art itself; above all, it may be noticed in the new attitude of the artist to the public. This is clearly shown in the so-called 'theatre-war,' in which Dekker, Marston, and Jonson, with others, attack one another in satirical pieces on the stage, jeering at and making fun of each other's weak points. Here is presupposed an interest in the playwright and a personal knowledge of his works on the part of the public which ten years before would have been impossible, and even now seems astonishing in the face of the general indifference exhibited toward the author, described above. The dramatist has evidently risen several degrees in the social scale.

In consequence of this innovation, conflicts with public opinion, which had so far gone unchallenged, were not to be avoided. It has already been related in another place (*cf.* the author, *Shakespeare im literarischen Urteil seiner Zeit*) how Ben Jonson, the most radical of the innovators, summarily denied the critical qualification of the public, which had rejected the more classical side of his art. The burning question after this seems to have been how far the public is entitled to follow its own taste and how far the artist ought to make concessions to it. This question, which in the course of the centuries is constantly

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

propounded in ever new variations whenever some small minority zealously essays to champion new ideals of art, obviously plays an important part with the Elizabethans. There was certainly no lack of people to take the side of the public. The conflict turned chiefly on the 'rules,' i.e., on a certain leaning to the side of classical authority. But as Marston, himself an important dramatist, not inaptly objects in the introduction to his play *What You Will* (1601): Why this contempt of public opinion?

Music and poetry were first approved  
By common sense ; and that which pleased most,  
Held most allowed to pass : not rules of art  
Were shaped to pleasure, nor pleasure to your rules.  
Think you that if his scenes took stamp in mint  
Of three or four deemed most judicious  
It would inforce the world to current them  
That you must spit defiance on dislike ?  
Now, as I love the light, were I to pass  
Through public verdict, I should fear my form,  
Lest aught I offered were unsquared or warped.

Shakespeare may have inclined to the same opinion ; as in innumerable other questions, his wisdom makes him take up a more conciliatory position. He probably did not share Jonson's intellectual arrogance toward public opinion, but it is obvious that he too has many grievances against the public. Still, he draws distinctions. His own opinion seems to find utterance in *Hamlet*—attacks on the "groundlings," the frequenters of the pit, their verdict being absolutely rejected as that of an uncomprehending mob, who care only for "inexplicable dumb-shows" and noise. Hamlet's bitter words, likewise, on the play that was "caviare to the general" and had to be taken off the boards as not pleasing "the million" are evidence of Shakespeare's way of thinking. Such expressions, however, were not uncommon in the literature of the time, and his contempt for the masses does not express his attitude to public opinion on the whole ; this is more clearly displayed in his works than by his words. *In the former*



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

*Shakespeare shows plainly how much importance he attached to following in the path of the popular drama.*

5. SHAKESPEARE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PUBLIC.—Shakespeare's attitude to the public has often been debated. On the one hand, our attention has been called to the fact that the troop in which he played was in the service of the Court and that in a piece like *Macbeth* he shows a flattering consideration—to say the least—for the personal ancestors of King James. On the other hand, we cannot get away from certain pieces of evidence offered as to the character of the theatre-going public of the time; of these the most instructive is the fact that the inhabitants of a district in which a theatre was to be erected lodged a complaint with the authorities, stating that a theatre meant only an increased opportunity for amorous intrigues of the lowest order, and would bring the whole neighbourhood into disrepute.

Obviously here too we must to a certain degree discriminate. Shakespeare by no means always writes for the same public. We may see this, for example, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was certainly written for a wedding in the house of some great personage. How much more refined the tone suddenly becomes in contrast to that of other pieces! No coarse word is uttered. When Hermia and her lover Lysander prepare for rest in the woods of Athens, and the situation becomes somewhat delicate, with what subtle roguery and grace this is expressed! Every suspicion of a lascivious thought is avoided. In other pieces, on the contrary, no opportunity is lost of inserting coarse expressions. "We have as much ribaldry in our plays as can be," says the ironical 'Histrio' in *The Poetaster*.

Now it is perfectly obvious that the creations of Shakespeare would have been impossible had the deciding vote been left to the noisy mob, known to us from so many contemporary descriptions. There must have been spectators who were to some extent capable of following the elevated flight of his thought and measuring the depth and delicacy of his feelings. They could, of course,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

belong to the middle class, even when the views expressed by the poet were of an aristocratic nature. For the chief thing is always the view of life prevailing among the sociological group that happens to predominate in the theatre at the time. *The Weavers*, by Gerhard Hauptmann, certainly did not owe its success to an audience of working men. The decisive thing, however, is that Shakespeare did not write for one small circle; he was careful always to keep the general public before his eyes.

6. OLDER DRAMATIC FORMS IN HIS WORK.—His art shows this tendency clearly. We can see how he retains just those *more popular* elements which some of the contemporary playwrights, even when writing for the popular theatre, were beginning to reject. Thus he retains, or returns to, the old popular form of the epic drama, which the others had mostly given up. For example, in a piece like *Antony and Cleopatra* the ceaseless changes of scene—in the third act there are no fewer than twelve, in the fourth even fifteen—counteract that pulling together of the plot which the others, not unrightly, regarded as an important improvement in dramatic art.

Only hesitatingly does he yield to the taste of the more educated part of the audience, which since the commencement of the seventeenth century had begun to rebel against the excessive bloodshed, the noise of battle, the riotous soldiery on the stage, and the practice of strewing the boards with corpses at the end of the piece. In a play like *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, the hostile armies alternately cross and recross the stage, and in *King Lear* the way in which the eyes of the aged Gloucester were trodden out in view of the public was but a survival of the old atrocity-plays, and not much to the liking of the more advanced taste of the age. There is, indeed, one detail in the drama of the period which may be regarded as symbolical of the whole dramatic tendency of the time, namely, the swinging about of a human head, cut off from its body, on the stage. This cut-off head was a stage-property that had survived from the time of the mystery-plays, when it was meant to represent the head of the unfortunate John the Baptist at the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

gruesome crowning point of the dance of Salome. It survived in several specimens, a favourite stage-property, in the popular theatre, certain, as we may presume, at every appearance of drawing the ironical applause of experienced theatre-goers, and probably known to the actors, whose sense of the comic was at all times keen, by some droll nickname now forgotten. In the three parts of the old drama of *Henry VI* this head appears at different times. Queen Margaret (2 *Henry VI*, IV, iv) presses it to her bosom as the head of her dead lover, Suffolk. A few scenes later it appears in duplicate and with a different signification, again further on (V, i) as the head of the rebel Cade. In *Richard III* the hero brandishes it as the head of the Duke of Somerset, in *King John* it has to serve as that of the Duke of Austria, in *Measure for Measure* it is supposed to be Claudio's head, in *Macbeth* it helps to symbolize the end of the great criminal, while Shakespeare's last drama, *Cymbeline*, once more gives an opportunity for the appearance of this venerable relic of the past in order to bring before our eyes the well-merited end of Cloten. It seems almost emblematic of Shakespeare's unwillingness to relinquish—unlike a number of the rising dramatists of this time—the close connexion with certain blunt and unrefined, but striking and effective, features of theatrical tradition.

A similar thing may be observed in his occasional use of parts of the "romances of chivalry." It is true that very little of these remains to us in the existing remnants of the dramatic literature of that time. We must, however, assume that such plays occupied an important place in the repertory of that period. Proof of this is not so much to be found in the printed plays, for the dramas in question were less frequently printed than the others; still, among the works extant such names as "the lonely Knight," "the Irish Knight," "the Knight of the Burning Rock," etc., are often met. Another proof is that Hamlet (II, ii), among the few typical characters which he enumerates, makes mention of the "adventurous knight" of "foil and target." We can see how he is at home in this fantastic world when he

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

mentions the name of the Saracen god Termagant, which often appears in such pieces, together with that of Herod, universally known in the old mysteries. "I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod" (*Hamlet*, III, ii, 15). But above all we may gain an impression of the "romances of chivalry" in the theatres of Elizabeth's time when we read the witty sarcasm of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a caricature in the style of *Don Quixote* which met with disfavour from a public not yet ready for it, because it was just the wider public which preferred that kind of art. Shakespeare's genius, it is true, as a rule soars too high for them, but occasionally he seems to be following in the steps of this art, as when in *King Lear*, the plot of which is laid in the grey dawn of history, he introduces a set combat, fought out between two knights. Here (V, iii) the combatants are solemnly challenged to fight by a herald with flourish of trumpets, and the hostile brothers, one disguised, the other with visor up, fight out their dispute strictly according to 'the rule of knighthood.' Such things evidently pleased the simpler part of the public.

7. THE ANACHRONISMS.—The characteristic traits just mentioned, however, do not stand alone. The popular tendency of Shakespeare's art is above all things evident in the flagrant and intentional anachronisms which he employs to render his art palatable to the public. Such references to the immediate present form part of the stock-in-trade of popular art in all periods of history, in Shakespeare's as well as in our time. In the old pre-Shakespearean *King Lear* the watchmen on the castle of Dover resolve to adjourn to a tavern, well known at the time, for the rest of their watch, and in the same piece Goneril abuses her sister as a "hypocritical puritan," while the other sister declares Cordelia to be best suited for a pastor's wife, on account of her lack of a dowry. On first reading his plays it is not always clear to what an immense extent Shakespeare too adheres to this custom. When Cleopatra plays billiards with her eunuch Mardian

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the anachronism may be unintentional, but in other passages the intention is only too evident (*King Lear*, I, iv, 19). It astonishes us when, for instance, in *King Lear* (I, iv, 95) the wrathful Kent calls Oswald "an evil foot-ball player," as a great deal of indignation had at that time been caused by idle fellows playing football in the principal streets of the town. It is, perhaps, just as striking when the mad King remarks of Edgar's costume that it does not please him, "You will say they are Persian attire," evidently in allusion to a Persian embassy which was at that time visiting the Court of King James. Even in moments of pathos he does not despise a popular allusive anachronism. But still more remarkable is the insertion, in *Hamlet*, of a whole passage where complaints are raised against the juvenile theatrical troops then playing in London and forcing the regular actors to tramp the provinces for bread. This rude interruption of the illusion has no parallel in the serious drama of Ben Jonson and his followers. Yet another sort of anachronism is to be seen in *Cymbeline*, where we find a mixing-up of Roman antiquity with the Italian world of Boccaccio which called forth Dr Johnson's criticism, and which later on was so warmly defended by Schlegel and Hazlitt, the romanticists. But even in this early time such anachronisms must have seemed unbearable to people who were proud of their freshly acquired humanistic learning, prouder, in fact, than those of later periods. It is, indeed, a distinguishing feature of the Renaissance that it brought forth the idea of a correct historical perspective, and one of its chief movements was directed against the simplicity of the Middle Ages, which could see the past only in the light of the present. This was certainly a characteristic of Shakespeare's which the following generation thought itself entitled to treat with derision.

8. THE CLOWN.—Shakespeare's striving after popularity is most clearly visible in his use of the clown. This has indeed been disputed, and æsthetic criticism, after having for centuries expurgated all the comic elements from his tragedies, has refused in the nineteenth century to perceive

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

in them concessions made to an ignorant mob, but has regarded them, on the contrary, as an admirable artistic device based on keen psychological insight. This sort of interpretation, however, is apt to dull our sense of the actual. It is true the rigorous laws of classicism demanded unity of style in tragedy, which necessarily excluded all elements of the comic from it. This demand may be unnatural and wrong. But what we have here is a blending of the comic with the tragic which, instead of presenting an alternation of different emotional hues in the same picture, destroys the frame of the illusion altogether. It drags in things which have no relation to the action, and therefore fail to heighten the tragic effect by force of contrast. This is no relaxation, but merely a disturbance. The dramatic satire of the Parnassus plays in Shakespeare's time was particularly aimed at this employment of the comic in the midst of a tragical scene (*cf.* the author's book, *Shakespeare im literarischen Urteil seiner Zeit*, p. 61 *seq.*). There, for example, a clown is suddenly and unexpectedly dragged on to the stage by a rope and is told: "Why, if thou canst but drawe thy mouth awrye, laye thy legg over thy staffe, sawe a peece of cheese asunder with thy dagger, lape up drinke on the earth, I warrant thee they will laughe mightilie." Whereupon the clown replies: "This is fine, y-faith! nowe, when they have nobodie to leave on the stage, they bringe mee up, and, which is worse, tell mee not what I shoulde saye!"

Nobody will deny that this kind of comic acting is coarse and primitive and calculated to destroy all illusion. It is not necessary to be an ardent adherent of classicism to feel repelled by it; even an uncultivated taste will find it unsupportable. There can be no doubt that in many cases these things strike us in a different light to-day, since such scenes have either been handed down to us imperfectly, or have acquired, in the course of time, a certain patina of antiquity which has toned them down into a certain harmony with the whole. The entire perspective has become shifted. To the educated spectators of that time it seems rightly to have been an occasion for annoyance that by

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

some silent agreement existing between the stage and the audience the entrance of the clowns was a signal that the assumption of a strange country and a different period of history had to be dropped. Two different environments enter into an irreconcilable conflict. Naturally in this blending of the comic element with the action of the play we find an endless variety of degrees. But, when in *Macbeth* (II, iii) the clown as doorkeeper makes jokes on the trial of the Jesuit Garnet, which took place in the year of the performance, or on the over-abundant harvest of the same year, or again when he makes obscene remarks on the influence of drinking on sexual desire, it is impossible for ordinary common sense to discover in them any profound artistic intention of heightening the tragical effect by the law of contrast. One might as well to-day interrupt the performance by reading the latest edition of the evening papers to the audience. Similarly, we can well understand that the better-educated part of the audience was disgusted at remarks like that of the first gravedigger in *Hamlet*, which destroyed every illusion (V, i, 67): "Go, get thee to Yaughan [some London tavern, probably that of the Globe Theatre itself]; fetch me a stoup of liquor."

Moreover, the clown scenes have in many cases been imperfectly handed down to us. It is true Hamlet seeks to prevent the usual improvisation in such cases by the words: "And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them." But it seems doubtful whether the traditional privilege of the fool to go beyond his text was really abolished by this kind of prescription. It would be worth while considering<sup>1</sup> whether, e.g., the fool in *Othello* (III, i) really took care to restrict himself to the few words he had to say, or if he did not rather seize on the opportunity of behaving in the manner reprimanded above.

For this reason the most important dramatists of the time, partly under Jonson's influence, prefer summarily to abandon all such traditional methods. But those who do

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Creizenach, *loc. cit.*, p. 341 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

not do so, like Shakespeare, are obviously guided by the wish not to lose all intimate contact with the masses. Shakespeare's contemporary, the playwright Thomas Heywood, expresses this in a few plain words, in which he essays an apology for the appearance of the comic figure : "For they that write to all must strive to please all and as such fashion themselves to a multitude consisting of spectators severally addicted."

9. CONCLUSIONS.—After all this there can be no further doubts as to the popular character of Shakespeare's art. Indeed, it is proved by sufficient external evidence. For while the curve of the literary appreciation of Shakespeare plainly reached its highest point shortly before the end of the sixteenth century, and then was depressed by the appearance of newer talents and movements and sank so low that Shakespeare's name was no more prominently mentioned among the other dramatists by the critics of the day, we may assume that his favour and popularity with the greater part of the public remained unshaken. It is interesting to see what the eulogists of Beaumont and Fletcher in their laudatory poems in the introduction to their complete edition (1646) of these authors have to say about Shakespeare. They reproach him with the use of old-fashioned, indecent jokes, "trunk-hose wit," as they call it.

All these things we must keep in mind in order to gain a firm foundation on which to base our judgment. It is remarkable in how many cases conclusions have been drawn without attention being paid to this standpoint. An example which brings this fault out in strong relief may be found in the treatment of *Troilus and Cressida*. Here the element which was for the most part unjustly looked upon by the critics of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup> as the 'parodistic tone' of the piece has been explained by Brandes as follows : "From his very childhood his ears, as well as every one else's, had been filled with the splendour of this event [*i.e.*, the Trojan War]. Every person who had taken part in it was the pattern of heroism,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John S. P. Tatlock, *Troilus and Cressida* (Publications of the Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America, 30, pp. 673-770).



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

magnanimity, wisdom, venerableness, friendship, and fidelity. As if such persons had ever existed ! For the first time in his life he felt the keen desire to caricature as much as possible, put out his tongue, make a grimace, and show up the seamy side—the real side.” But did Shakespeare’s company act before an audience of sixth-form schoolboys ? What an absurdity to imagine that Shakespeare ever would or could have desired to summon the spectators of the Globe Theatre to a critical discussion on the (supposedly) traditional conception of the ethical value of the heroes of classical antiquity !

It is very evident that until this anachronistic point of view has been abandoned as absolutely untenable the correct historical contemplation of Shakespeare’s art is out of the question. To read and interpret the Shakespearean drama in the light of the same standards as we do that of Ibsen would be as wrong as tacitly to identify the mental qualities of Shakespeare’s audience with Ibsen’s.

If now, in spite of the popular tone which we have traced in his creations, we find so much that offers a riddle to our intelligence, we must ask ourselves whether we have not, in many cases, lost a key to these riddles of which Shakespeare’s contemporaries were in possession. The following exposition will make it clear that in a certain sense this is actually the case. Shakespearean exegesis has hitherto started almost exclusively with the most advanced side of his art, and has sought to judge all the rest from this. But Shakespeare’s art-form is in fact a mixture of the most highly developed with quite primitive elements : on one side an inexpressible delicacy and subtlety in the portraiture of the soul, on the other aids and props to the understanding of the most antiquated description, as well as elements in the plot uncritically adopted and never properly fused into the play of character. In the following pages I shall endeavour to indicate some of these, and so do away with a number of sources of error in Shakespearean interpretation. Only the American scholar E. E. Stoll has lately, independently of the author, sought to promote this view—*i.e.*, that an historical understanding of Shakespeare

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

is to be reached only by taking him much more literally than we have been wont to do, his art as more naïve, his methods as frequently far more primitive.

Certainly we cannot hope in this way to disperse all at once the numerous difficulties confronting us, Shakespeare's work being too instinctive and his methods too irregular for that. But we may approach him considerably nearer than hitherto, and a great number of attempts at explanation by the most renowned commentators will appear untenable from the very outset.

It may, therefore, be said of the following comments that in some parts they represent the first attempt to assist Shakespearean exegesis by offering it a method. Whoever has looked with horror at the endless caprices to be found in this field will perhaps regard this attempt as not having been made in vain.

Thus our manner of contemplating Shakespeare is intended to open out new methods for an historically correct conception of his characters by indicating the limits of realism and primitive art in Shakespeare's technique. On the other hand, it does not intend to be exhaustive. It does not hunt a method to death, and it refrains from enumerating all the parallel passages. It purposely restricts itself to certain examples, selecting only such in each case as allow the presentation and analysis of the most important character problems in Shakespeare's works, so that in this sense also the contents may correspond to the title.

It may perhaps be objected that the ultimate result of our method of historically correct criticism will not prove favourable to Shakespeare in the conventional sense. In this respect it is no mere chance that the name of Rümelin, the author of *Shakespeare-Studien eines Realisten*, will often be found in the following pages. This highly gifted and artistic critic has too often been regarded as a sort of Lucifer by the representatives of orthodox Shakespearean research, a rebel who in arrogant and infatuated delusion rose against the divinity of Shakespeare, thereby meriting to be hurled into the darkest depths of oblivion. But to be a worshipper of the letter is more often the result of

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

a lack of judgment than of real piety. The man who, like the latest orthodox Shakespeareans, argues that to us Shakespear can no longer be an object of criticism, but only a standard of art, will be little likely to forward a right understanding of him. Shakespearean research would have been more advanced to-day if it had in time taken up Rümelin's method of criticism and seriously dealt with the valuable suggestions contained in it by means of historical literary investigation.

In adopting this attitude the author does not wish to imply that he starts from Rümelin's point of view, that he subscribes to every word of his conception. On the contrary, he must confess to having met with him somewhat late on his way, and to holding opinions quite different from his in many instances. The ultimate result, however, be it as it may, can certainly not be decisive in regard to the correctness of the method in this case. No matter if in some cases our judgment of passages which we have been accustomed to regard as containing unspoken hints of profound meaning and representing special artistic perfections should prove to be historically untenable and due to our own subjective imagination: Shakespeare's incomparable genius is rich enough to stand in no need of borrowed renown.

# I

## DIRECT SELF-EXPLANATION

**T**HE RELATIONS BETWEEN ACTORS AND AUDIENCE.—The primitive and popular features of Shakespearean art described in the Introduction have demonstrated the close connexion which existed between the stage and the audience. It is necessary, however, to become quite clear on this point, in order properly to estimate its influence on dramatic technique. We must remember that our illusion in the theatre is entirely different from that of the Elizabethans, as has been excellently shown by Kilian (*Shak. Jahrbuch*, 39, p. xiv *seq.*). Our drama is enacted under the tacit agreement that there are no spectators present. Only one wall, that in front of the audience, is wanting to the scene. In contrast to this, Shakespeare's stage is surrounded by the spectators on three sides. The actor may be said to stand in the midst of the audience; he is always mindful of this while he is acting, and evidently in many cases directly addresses his spectators. Kilian proves how strikingly this relation is evidenced by the monologue, in which the speaker, so to say, fraternizes with the audience, and how the whole dramatic composition and the illusion connected with it may in this manner be absolutely destroyed. It is no longer a monologue in the proper sense—*i.e.*, the expression of an individual who, thinking aloud, renders account of his most intimate thoughts and feelings—but a means which the author uses in order to instruct his audience about the events, or about the plans and character of the personage speaking. Such instruction and explanation is further emphasized by the form in which the actor delivering the monologue addresses the audience; *e.g.*, "And

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

mark how well the sequel hangs together," or "To say the truth," or "Mark me now." Kilian shows how this use of elements which according to our present view contradict the essence of the monologue forms a peculiar feature of Shakespeare's monologues in every period of his art, and most clearly appears in the latest products of his riper years.

2. SELF-EXPLANATION IN HARMONY WITH THE CHARACTER (REMARKS ON THE CHARACTERS OF HAMLET, FALSTAFF, ETC.).—In drawing attention to the simplicity of the soliloquizing actor who allows his audience to look behind his mask, we have taken only a partial, though very characteristic, aspect of this technical device. It is not true that the Shakespearean drama shows the traces of a more primitive time only in this one respect, while closely resembling the modern drama in all others. The primitiveness and a certain childishness manifested in the traits with which we have so far become acquainted is apparent, less distinctly, perhaps, but recognizable on closer scrutiny, in the whole mechanism of the Shakespearean drama. All the details of the technique are more harmless, simple, unsophisticated, than we are inclined to imagine. The monologue is not the only and not the most important among the naïve devices used for enlightening the audience. In the course of the play—that is, in the actual dialogue—the characters on the stage supply the audience with the most important information about themselves and reveal the innermost secrets of their nature. In a number of cases, it is true, most people will not regard this practice as a clumsy technical device, but rather look upon it as a tendency of the author to endow his figures with an inclination toward introspection, most probably without any conscious intention of throwing light upon the mental features of his personages for the spectators' benefit. Where this inclination is unobtrusive and incorporated in other similar traits, as, for example, the habit of self-reproach, it will at once escape the suspicion of being merely a primitive and intentional device. Nevertheless, these instances also are

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

worthy of note. A case in point is to be found in *Hamlet*. The great majority of serious critics are agreed on the necessity of conceiving Hamlet not as a man of action, but essentially as a man of reflection. This reflection, however, is not only directed upon the world but also upon himself. The utterances of Hamlet in this latter respect are usually regarded as chiefly characterizing the subjective state of his soul. Indeed, who would take the failings and self-accusations, the insults with which he tries to spur himself to action, the doubts of himself, for Gospel truth? But while taking this view, we must not overlook that in this character too we can discern Shakespeare's tendency to make his figures explain themselves in a manner which must be taken very seriously and which far transcends mere self-accusation and doubt.

A fundamental feature of Hamlet's character is a fanatical sense of truth. The reference to this quality contained in one of Hamlet's first utterances in the play, "I know not 'seems'" (I, ii), may be regarded as a necessary product of the situation and a proper and natural detail of the dialogue. This explanation, however, will not hold good if regard to the passage where he mentions his weakness. He describes it by saying that King Claudius is "no more like my father than I to Hercules" (I, ii). This means that he is the very opposite of the embodiment of bodily strength. Further, when he speaks of "my weakness and my melancholy" (II, ii, toward the end), these allusions, according to the more or less clearly outlined conceptions which his contemporaries had of the 'melancholy' type of character in the drama, point to a group of qualities not in any way contradictory to those of which he accuses himself in other places. Especially of his ambition he speaks on various occasions, once mentioning it in plain words (III, i, 126), and also later on showing several times that the accession of his uncle has disappointed his hopes (V, ii, 65, etc.). His pride, which he mentions to Ophelia in the same passage, often appears, and who would deny that his behaviour shows some of that vindictiveness of which he accuses

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

himself on the same occasion? This trait too is clearly worked out, especially by contrasting Hamlet with his friend. When he explains to Horatio the clever trick which has helped him to get rid of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for ever, the good fellow, otherwise accustomed to go with him through thick and thin, is unable to suppress a certain uneasiness, and replies: "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go 'to 't.'" Hamlet, almost offended, makes a firm stand against all scruples: "Why, man, they did make love to this employment." Whoever allows himself to be employed against him must suffer the consequences; he feels no pity for him, as Polonius also was to find out.

The effect of self-explanation is thoroughly natural in all cases where it is put into the mouth of an introspective character like Hamlet. He strives for truth at any cost, and his state of mind makes it conceivable that in his self-revelation he should not shrink even from cruelty against his own personality. Being so natural and comprehensible, this trait in the Prince's character does not attract any undue attention in this passage. Indeed, there can be no denying that the question as to the respective claims of self-explanation and self-reproach occasionally requires a careful investigation. This trait, however, has evidently become so much second nature to Shakespeare in his dramatic work that he bestows it even upon characters who are anything but fanatical worshippers of truth. This applies to a certain extent even to Falstaff himself. It is true a great part of the comic effect which radiates from this figure is due to the opposite trait, viz., the endeavour of the fat knight to create for himself a character which he does not possess, as, for instance, when he makes himself out to be a hero or succeeds in wrapping himself up in an atmosphere of uprightness which is of only very doubtful quality and is excellently fitted for inducing the kind-hearted hostess to part with her last penny. In case of need, when driven into a position of self-defence, he changes his character as he might do a mask, and on being driven from one cover he immediately finds another just

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

as favourable. The masks, of course, fit him so ill and protect him so little that everybody sees through them at once, and he himself dares only to put them on with a humorous twinkle of his eye. The comic effect is all the greater when the stupidity of Justice Shallow prevents him from recognizing the bad moral disguise and makes him regard the fat knight as an influential lord at Court, or when the hostess, after having been cheated a thousand times, is once more taken in by his protestations.

Falstaff, though his is a character not at all given to self-analysis, nevertheless finds very shrewd and apt expressions to throw light upon certain sides of his personality and its relation to his environment: "I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men" (1 *Henry IV*, II, i). These words give the briefest possible formula for the part he has to play in the drama, and clearly describe the category to which he belongs. To be witty himself and to stimulate laughter and wit in others is the business of the clown. Indeed, Falstaff is not principally a swaggerer and blusterer, as certain misguided literary critics would have him be, but is the prince and grand master of all dramatic clowns, and belongs to the dramatic tradition which makes the clown the centre of the comic underplot in the serious drama. Falstaff's definition of himself also suggests an excellent reason for the magic attraction exerted by the Boar's Head Tavern: he is a witty carouser and boon companion who indulges every one of his whims, and whose humour irresistibly infects his company, calls forth their good spirits, and provides them with an inexhaustible source of merriment by allowing them to use him with impunity as the target of their wit.

The fact that he is old and they are young makes no difference, for—here again his own remark throws light upon the character—"The truth is," he says to the Lord Chief Justice, "I am only old in judgment and understanding" (2 *Henry IV*, I, ii).

This hits the nail on the head. Falstaff, while possessing the soundest experience of old age, is also endowed with the mercurial versatility, the unbounded elasticity,



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the light-heartedness and power of enjoyment found only in the young man of eighteen who takes no thought of the morrow, and in the blind confidence of youth pays little heed to the consequences of his actions. The old grey-beard utters only his most heartfelt conviction when on the occasion of the robbery, whipping up his own courage with violent words, he roars at the frightened travellers: "What! ye knaves, young men must live" (1 *Henry IV*, II, ii).

The objection may be made that this youth is artificial and owes its origin to drink, the indispensable stimulant to Falstaff's humour. Certainly no actor would give a correct representation of Falstaff who did not use this sort of drunken good-humour as a key to his character. Moreover, the meekness and the cheap compassion for his own condition is that of the old toper. There is a vein of youthfulness in him, however—the hilarious mood of the eighteen-year-old student on the spree, itching for practical jokes. It breaks out when, in an advanced stage of jollity, his riotous imagination prompts him to impersonate the King in a "comedy extempore," making the armchair his throne, the leaden dagger his sceptre, clapping a "cushion" on his head for a crown, and mimicking with stilted pomposity and ridiculous affectation of pathos the reproachful father and King.

A similar importance must be attached to the assertions which King Lear makes about himself. All Shakespeare's kings, even his crowned rascals, are surrounded by a certain halo of prestige. Shakespeare's fervent royalism is seen in his preference for one in particular of all the forms of the sentiment of veneration—namely, reverence for superiors and its obverse, princely pride. Pride, in Shakespeare's eyes, is a necessary attribute of the great. In *All's Well that Ends Well* an eminent man is praised for possessing pride without contempt, and although his "humility" is lauded he is admired because

who were below him

He us'd as creatures of another place.

So the idea of "service" has nothing repugnant to him. "You have that in your countenance," Kent says to Lear,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

"which I would fain call master." His Lear has a greater endowment of this kind of majesty than any other figure in his plays. For this reason the blows of Fate that inflict such cruel wounds on his pride are infinitely more painful to him than acts of ingratitude and baseness would be to an ordinary mind. But the more his pride is wounded, the more clearly does it show its unconquerable nature; it will perish only with the life of the King himself. Even in his madness this pride remains unshaken. He arises more majestic where others would be in danger of lapsing into ridicule. Thus we may indeed say of Lear, applying the Shakespearean conception of kingliness, that he is "every inch a king." This characteristic phrase, again, is uttered by the King *with reference to himself* (IV, vi, 110). The significance of these words is not greatly affected by the fact that they are spoken in a state of madness.

3. AMBIGUOUS SELF-EXPLANATION (RASCALS AND HEROES; JULIUS CÆSAR).—On proceeding further in our inquiry, we begin to see certain difficulties in the application of this technical device. It must be admitted that this trait, according to our modern conceptions, can be approved only in passages where the action gives warrant for it and where it has no disturbing influence on the characterization. In most cases, however, it will prove unsuitable because of its psychological impossibility or because of the conflict which it produces between the direct and the indirect methods of characterization.

As regards the first difficulty, it would clearly be an absolute self-contradiction if, for instance, anybody were to explain in long-winded speeches, and with a great wealth of vocabulary, that he is remarkable for his gift of silence, and it would be equally absurd to endeavour to prove stupidity by a great display of clever arguments, or superficiality<sup>1</sup> by means of heartrending complaints, or to express a matter-of-fact disposition in highly poetical language. Common experience will show that cleverness consists in properly recognizing what is stupid, that nobody

<sup>1</sup> Like Browning's Andrea del Sarto, who deeply moves us by confessing that unfortunately his superficial character prevents him from being a good painter!

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

can be superficial who suffers from a sense of his own deficiencies, and that beauty of language is a sure sign of artistic talent. Shakespeare's transgressions of this law will be dealt with later on.

The second difficulty may be regarded as almost more important than the first one. In ordinary life an utterance of a person made in order to draw attention to supposedly praiseworthy or reprehensible sides of his character allows us to infer his real character by way of indirect characterization; and we believe we can apply the same kind of reasoning to persons in a play, since we know that to recognize the good or evil in oneself, and even to go so far as to show them in the presence of others, requires special characteristics. Most interpreters following the traditional method have seen no difficulties here. Utterances of criminal personages in which they openly describe their deeds as wicked were unquestioningly taken for Gospel truth and hardly ever regarded as serving as a means of indirect characterization. Lady Macbeth (I, v), looking at her own behaviour from an outside point of view, calls it "cruelty," and describes her murderous intentions as "fell." A man like Iago, for example, terms his own behaviour villainy. "'Tis here, but yet confused," he says, after hatching the devilish plot of destroying Othello, his master; "*Knavery's* plain face is never seen till used" (II, i, 320). Cloten, in *Cymbeline*, the villain of the piece, quite glibly talks of the villainous orders he has given (III, v, 113). A person who is so little weighed down with the recognition of his own wickedness we usually style a cynic. This appellation might possibly fit a real rascal like Edmund in *King Lear*, who describes himself as "rough and lecherous" (I, ii, 145). But this would be to regard these matters from an entirely erroneous point of view. This kind of self-characterization should not be considered as in any way an attempt at realism. Wetz (*Die Menschen in Shakespeares Dramen*, p. 184) seriously states that "*Shakespeare's wretches and villains are perfectly clear about the criminal nature of their actions.*" This flatly contradicts the truth of life.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

A more recent investigator, Wolff, tries to explain this trait by observing that in the Renaissance period people were far more frank and open, whereas "under the stronger pressure of modern public morality they never abandon their hypocrisy and refuse to lift the mask of dissimulation even in their own private thoughts." In point of probability we should rank this line of argument about as highly as an attempt to explain the five-legged lions of the Assyrians by asserting that lions with five legs had actually existed at that time, or to account for the primitive drawings of prehistoric men, in which faces are represented in profile, yet having two eyes, by declaring that in those days a man's two eyes were both on the same side of his face. The source of the error here is a misconception of the art-form, which itself is primitive. The Assyrians wished the lion to have four legs from whichever side it was looked at. In the drama the villain is to be a villain, the noble character is to appear noble, from whichever side we look at them. This mode of representation has never been true to facts, neither in the Renaissance nor before; in all probability even Cain did not lack a very good reason for killing Abel (though this may not have been, as Byron asserts, his extreme dullness). The reason for this departure from reality is to be looked for in the careful regard which Shakespeare everywhere pays to the limited mental capacity of the public. The poet desires above all to avoid misapprehension of the main outlines of the action and the characters, to prevent the spectators from confusing the ethical values and from taking pleasure in the vices represented and the situations produced by them. In short, the public was an influential factor in determining the art-form.

We have long been accustomed, by a tacit agreement, not to take offence at this aspect of Shakespearean technique, but to regard it as a primitive trait, impossible nowadays, and therefore not exposed to misinterpretations. When the villains talk of their villainy we do not on that account consider them as cynics. Numerous critics of *Othello*, for example, find in certain speeches of Iago, in spite of the utterance cited above, an endeavour to palliate his

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

wickedness, a thing which no cynic ever does. This kind of characterization turns out to be entirely traditional. Just in the same way the Jew of Malta, notwithstanding the very special reasons for his action, says of himself, on entering upon his villainous course: "Now will I show myself to have more of the serpent than the dove; that is, more knave than fool."

In this inquiry we are too apt to overlook the question that might be raised: What are we to think of utterances just the opposite of these, containing references to praiseworthy qualities? If Shakespeare's art-form is still so imperfect that it does not allow us, as we do nowadays, to interpret the calm description given by a person of his own baseness as a sign of cynicism, are we then forbidden to perceive in self-revelations regarding the possession of valuable moral qualities nothing but conceit, boastfulness, or arrogance? Here we may remember the ghost of Hamlet's father, who thinks himself so superior to his brother Claudius, a person "whose natural gifts were poor to those of mine" (I, v, 51 *seq.*). This description in point of fact perfectly agrees with that which Hamlet gives of his father; nevertheless, spoken by the father himself, these words strike us as somewhat self-complacent. Did Shakespeare mean this? There does not seem to be any sense in thus showing up a weak side in the character of the ghost. Let us further consider the account which Prospero in *The Tempest* gives of himself, how he designates himself as

the prime duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal arts  
Without a parallel. I, ii, 73

Cordelia, too, in *King Lear* may serve as an illustration. In the exposition she describes herself as wanting

that glib and oily art  
To speak and purpose not, *since what I well intend,*  
*I'll do't before I speak.* . . .  
. . . [I lack] that *for which I am richer,*  
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue  
That I am glad I have not.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Here her air of knowing perfectly well what she is doing in presenting her advantages in their true light strikes a false note in the infinite harmony of her being, so that Kreyssig (p. 127) thinks he can discover a ring of something like "sauciness" in "the reply with which the daughter of the old Lear cannot quite disguise her race." We may regard it as absolutely certain, however, that Shakespeare had not the slightest intention of endowing with any trait of vanity the touching figure of Cordelia, whom we see on other occasions, overpowered by her emotions, standing speechless, unable to articulate a word or even to produce a single sound.

We may also think of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, a personage much given to self-characterization, which, however, is adroitly interwoven with the action. Sometimes we seem to perceive traits in him which make us doubt whether they are intentional or not. It does sound like a boast when he describes himself as "arm'd so strong in honesty." It is evident, however, that this was not Shakespeare's intention. He merely overdoes the emphasis in order not to miss being clearly understood; hence the false impression we receive. Brutus acts without any selfish motives—his morality seems even to surpass that of his model in Plutarch—he only follows his duty, obeying that which he calls his "honour." He is meant to possess dignity, self-esteem, and well-merited pride. In expressing these qualities, however, he seems to us to transgress the limit which divides self-esteem from vanity and boastfulness. Any other personage might say, for example, that it would be an honour to be slain by Brutus; from his own mouth (V, i, 59) this remark strikes us as in bad taste, and as a sign of arrogance.

The attempt may be made to explain this practice here as due to Shakespeare's opinion that this manner of praising oneself was a Roman custom. There is little ground, however, for this supposition. We find the same trait in other characters who are not Romans; for example, when Henry V, giving audience to the French ambassadors and seeing them hesitate to deliver the arrogant message

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of their Dauphin, praises his kingly self-command in the words :

We are no tyrant, but a Christian king,  
Unto whose grace our passion is as subject  
As are our wretches fetter'd in our prisons.

*Henry V, I, ii, 241*

It is just this monarch who proves himself to be anything but a braggart.

A more difficult question is presented by the objection that possibly at that time self-praise was not considered as a moral defect, at least so long as it did not overstep the limits of truth, that the expression of pride in one's own achievements and ability was less hampered by moral restraint than in later times. In that case the dramatist's conception would be true to the life of his time, and ours would be based upon a false, anachronistic conception. One glance, however, into the history of the manners of that time, a short perusal of some of those modest speeches with which high functionaries, like the Speakers of Elizabeth's Parliament, entered upon their offices, suffice to show us that here we are no longer in the Homeric age, and that modesty in speaking of one's own person is by no means foreign to Elizabethan times. So we shall probably have to be satisfied with the conclusion that we are here face to face with a mere dramatic tradition, very liable to misinterpretation. On the other hand, Shakespeare may have been influenced in endowing his figures of sovereigns with this trait by the pompous style in which the crowned dignitaries of his as well as of our own time speak of themselves in royal edicts, though no personal qualities are implied here.

All this is much less significant for the characterization of Brutus than of *Julius Cæsar* himself. Cæsar is one of those Shakespearean figures who have almost without exception been misunderstood by an anachronistic school of criticism, most flagrantly perhaps by Brandes. In the light of his investigation Shakespeare's Cæsar has become a contemptible wretch ; he goes so far as to call him a caricature, "the sum-total of all unpleasant qualities." He makes

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

the impression of an invalid. Stress is laid on his suffering from falling-sickness. He is deaf of one ear. He is no longer in possession of his old vigour. He swoons when the crown is offered to him. He envies Cassius, who is a better swimmer than himself. He is as superstitious as any old crone. He enjoys flattery, talks pompously and haughtily, boasts of his firmness, and is changeable and inconsistent. He acts imprudently, unreasonably, and does not recognize the dangers threatening him, whereas all others see them" (2nd ed., p. 431 *seq.*). In another passage Brandes calls him puffed up with conceit, always ceremonious, starched, and stilted, and adds that nobody really believes his assertion that he is ignorant of fear. Other critics have further reproached him with being theatrical.

It is undoubtedly true that for a number of these traits evidence can be found in the play. When Cæsar, for example (I, ii), asks Antony to touch his wife at the feast of the Lupercal because "our elders say" that this is a cure for barrenness he shows himself to be superstitious. This trait, however, Shakespeare found in Plutarch, where it is referred to as a common Roman belief, and, reading in the same source of Cæsar's belief in omens, he rightly transferred it to Cæsar. Moreover, this is one of those small touches which he employs to produce in the drama the true colour of antiquity. Plutarch also tells us of the emperor's epilepsy and headache; Shakespeare converts these diseases into the falling-sickness and deafness of one ear. As regards this last point, we must admit that we cannot explain why he has represented Cæsar as deaf. There is no authority either for his description of Cæsar's ambiguous attitude toward flattery, and his conviction that he himself is inaccessible to it (MacCallum, p. 223). Brandes' reproach, however, that Cæsar is "always changeable and inconsistent" greatly overshoots the mark. The scene which Brandes chiefly uses to justify this accusation is the one in Plutarch where Cæsar, on the morning of his assassination, moved by the prayers of his wife, who is frightened by her dream, has decided not to go to the senate-house, and is induced to change



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

his mind by the cunning interpretation which Decius, one of the conspirators, gives of the dream. It is impossible, however, to infer from this scene that Cæsar is inconsistent or timid; only when his wife goes down on her knees to implore him does he yield and abandon his decision. After her feats have been lulled and silenced by the treacherous eloquence of Decius there is no further reason to prevent him from going.<sup>1</sup> The other traits also, with the exception of Cæsar's boastfulness, are all in a very similar manner drawn from Plutarch.

The fact that Shakespeare borrowed these traits from his source would not suffice in itself to disprove Brandes' representation. Supposing each of them to be historically correct, their combination might nevertheless be effected in a one-sided and biased manner amounting almost to a falsification. By methodically utilizing less sympathetic traits related by Plutarch the figure of Brutus too might have been radically altered. We must ask ourselves, however, what reason Shakespeare could have had for giving such a caricature of Julius Cæsar. This would be all the more astonishing as in various passages of his dramas he speaks of him with the greatest respect, and unswervingly follows the well-known tradition which saw in him one of the greatest of men, perhaps *the* greatest of all times. Most Shakespearean critics have answered this question by asserting that he found it advisable not to make Cæsar too great, as otherwise the conspirators would have appeared too insignificant in comparison. Dramatic necessities, therefore, above all the prominent importance assigned to Brutus, the moral hero of the play, are said to have thrown the figure of Cæsar into the background. This explanation has been rejected by Brandes, who saw its unsoundness without himself being able to

<sup>1</sup> It may also be that even before yielding to his wife he has been a little unnerved by her terrible anxiety. But the way in which some critics, and especially M. W. MacCallum in his excellent book, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background* (London, 1910, p. 221 seq.), construe a disagreement between this scene and Cæsar's declaration in the senate that his resolutions are as unshakable as the polar star strikes one as almost ludicrous. Cæsar in no way loses his character by doing his wife a favour which, after all, is very insignificant.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

substitute a better one. He flatly denies the necessity of belittling Cæsar, and insists that Shakespeare might have improved the play by representing him as great; indeed, as the conflict is based on a political contrast, the drama could only have been rendered more tragic by the purely human greatness of the person sacrificed. There are thus important dramatic reasons why the limitations to which the part of Cæsar is subjected can affect only the amount of space allotted to it and its share in the action, not the human proportions of his personality. We must not lightly suppose that Shakespeare, who knew very well how to represent historical or legendary poetic figures, like Henry V, Cressida, and Cleopatra, of whom his contemporaries had a vivid impression, would have dared to put before them a Julius Cæsar whose great qualities had been consciously and purposely suppressed. This being ruled out as quite impossible, why then should such an inflated "invalid," as Brandes styles him, be shown on the stage in the place of Julius Cæsar?

The answer is not difficult. Shakespeare's Cæsar, if we refuse to read the drama with the eyes of the critics mentioned above, will appear to us in a very different light. It is true many of the enumerated traits are actually there, but they do not *show* much. That they obtrude so little is due to the impression which we receive of Cæsar. His greatness is shown less in his own person than in the enormous influence which he exercises upon his environment. He is the centre of everything. The very first scene shows the town full of jubilation over his triumph, which entices even the artisan from his honest work. His enemies are seen to be possessed by a kind of impotent fury against the gigantic power of that influence which lays the world at his feet. Even the words uttered, with gnashing of teeth, by the most relentless of his enemies, the irreconcilable Cassius, echo the admiration of the whole world:

This man

Is now become a god.

. . . he doth bestride the narrow world

Like a colossus.

I, ii, 114

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Also the reverence which Brutus feels for him in his soul is boundless : " We all stand up against the spirit of Cæsar " (II, i, 167). They all know, even when killing him, that he is " the foremost man of all this world " (IV, iii, 22). In this manner an atmosphere is created in which Cæsar appears surrounded by a magic light, which after his fall adds a still greater lustre to his memory. It is therefore quite absurd to suppose that Shakespeare diminishes the importance of Cæsar. Rather must we say that *the vastness of his figure is tacitly or openly presupposed in all the happenings of the play.*

The question now arises whether his demeanour in the play corresponds to the great opinion generally entertained of him. We know that occasionally in Shakespeare's works a contradiction may appear between these two things, as, for example, in the characterization of King Claudius (*vide infra*). But here we can speak only very conditionally of such a contradiction. Cæsar is represented as a born ruler of men, an imperious character in every sense of the term. His very first speeches consist of a succession of commands. One after the other Calpurnia, Antony, the procession, the soothsayer, the musicians, etc., are given their orders ; even Antony, himself an important personage, is at his beck and call like a schoolboy. When he is furious his entourage, even if a Cicero be among them, look " like a chidden train " (I, ii, 182), and they dwindle down to the size of mere retainers the moment he shows himself. With unerring penetration he reads their characters ; of the lean Cassius especially he expects nothing good. But though he professes to be ignorant of fear he yields to the urgent requests of his wife, who is anxious to keep him at home on that fateful morning until her care is dispelled ; nevertheless, he goes out with the conspirators, chatting gaily with them. On his way he encounters the last chance of saving himself in the person of a well-wisher who tries to warn him. But as the conspirators at the same time present him with a petition the attempt to warn him fails, chiefly because of the clumsiness of his friend, who, urged by the fullness of his heart,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

presses his paper upon him with the remark that it contains a matter touching him personally. This is only a reason, however, for Cæsar in his sublime impartiality to defer the perusal until the other matter has been transacted, and he angrily rebukes the petitioner, who, in his anxiety, refuses to obey. No trace of small-mindedness is perceivable in all these actions, nothing that could lower his dignity or be at variance with his greatness. Some of his words, like the famous and profound remark,

He thinks too much ; such men are dangerous,  
I. ii, 192

bear the stamp of genius. Moreover, his behaviour in the assassination scene does not betray the "invalid" of Brandes. No cry of fear, no lamentation from his lips, interrupts the terrible catastrophe.

This being the true picture of Cæsar, how did the critics come by the impression described above? The reason evidently is that Shakespeare has endowed his hero with a number of small human traits which are indispensable for enlivening the portrait and rendering it truly individual. The excessive reverence in which he is held by all probably assured the dramatist that by making him human he did not risk destroying that impression of greatness on which the whole play rests. Thus he gave him the historically interesting traits of the falling-sickness, of a certain superstition, allowed his mortal enemy sneeringly to relate the story (invented by Shakespeare, but here to be taken as true to the character of Cæsar) about his bodily weakness, and made another conspirator remark that he was not inaccessible to flattery. All these details, however, are of little significance. They show him to be human after all, but they do not reduce the gigantic dimensions of his personality. Shakespeare even makes him appear nobler than does Plutarch, who, for example, expressly states that his reasons for not wishing to go to the senate-house on the day of assassination were suspicion and apprehension. In the drama, however, it is only Calpurnia for whose sake he decides to remain at home. Much the same

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

may be said of the coronation scene, which fails in such a curious manner. Here Shakespeare, true to his usual practice, almost exactly reproduces what is related in Plutarch, and thus, in a way, makes him responsible for the psychological probability of the whole occurrence. The importance of this scene, however, is not so great as to merit closer attention.

We have now shown that the traits mentioned are in no way at variance with Cæsar's greatness. It would be too much, however, to maintain that they all serve to express it in the best possible manner. We witness none of the deeds which render Cæsar immortal, or which only he can perform. To represent them was certainly not Shakespeare's intention, because Cæsar's greatness appears sufficiently without them. The play does not treat of the "famous victories of Julius Cæsar," and according to its original plan—it is probable that this external plan is not due to Shakespeare himself, but was taken over by him—it can represent him as crowned with laurel wreaths, but cannot show how these were gained. His *Coriolanus* later on is arranged according to an essentially different plan, and begins by showing the hero engaged in the greatest undertaking of his life, so that we are not required, during the whole succession of scenes, to trust implicitly to the author for the hero's greatness. *Coriolanus* was unknown to his audience. In the case of Julius Cæsar such a procedure was unnecessary; his greatness was proclaimed loudly enough in universal history.

All objections raised against the characterization of Cæsar have now been dealt with and refuted, with one exception. That which remains is apparently the strongest of them all, and the only one which explains our treatment of this whole question in this connexion. It is the opinion that Cæsar is drawn as the type of the braggart, a theatrical, bombastic, pompous, puffed-up, conceited, and boastful person. Here we encounter a gross misunderstanding of Shakespeare's art-form which characterizes all Shakespearean criticism of the last hundred years. It is true people of our times who read or hear Cæsar's words without

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

having a connected idea of Shakespeare's methods of characterization will undoubtedly receive an unsympathetic impression of the kind just described. Thus, for example, we are astonished by the frequent repetition of his assurance that he is ignorant of fear. Of Cassius he says :

. . . I fear him not :  
Yet if my name were liable to fear,  
I do not know the man I should avoid  
So soon as that spare Cassius. . .  
I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd  
Than what I fear, for always I am Cæsar.

I, ii, 195

He remarks to Calpurnia :

Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
It seems to me most strange that men should fear ;  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
Will come when it will come.

II, ii, 34

And again :

. . . danger knows full well  
That Cæsar is more dangerous than he :  
We are two lions litter'd in one day,  
And I the elder and more terrible.

II, ii, 44

The same high opinion of himself which animates these last words he voices in the lines :

. . . the things that threaten'd me  
Ne'er look'd but on my back ; when they shall see  
The face of Cæsar, they are vanished.

II, ii, 10

The scene which best shows his self-esteem is that in the Capitol, before his assassination. When Metellus Cimber, according to the arrangement of the conspirators, kneels before him and addresses his entreaties to him, Cæsar, without the least suspicion of the danger which is now hanging immediately over his head, indignantly replies :

These couchings and these lowly courtesies,  
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

And turn pre-ordinance and first decree  
*Into the law of children. Be not fond,*  
To think that Cæsar bears such rebel blood  
That will be thaw'd from the true quality  
With that which melteth fools.

III, i, 36

Still more clearly he draws a line between the others and himself in the last words which are directed toward the whole body of the conspirators :

I could be well moved if I were as you ;  
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me ;  
But I am constant as the northern star,  
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament.  
The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,  
They are all fire and every one does shine,  
But there's but one in all doth hold his place :  
So in the world ; 'tis furnish'd well with men,  
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive ;  
Yet in the number I do know but one  
That unassailable holds on his rank,  
Unshaked of motion : and that, I am he,  
Let me a little show it, even in this. . . .

III, i, 58

When the petitioner, regardless of all refusals, once more besieges him with solicitations, he sums up all that he has said of himself, rising to a climax in his angry exclamation :

Hence ! Wilt thou lift up Olympus ?

III, i, 74

The answer is given by the daggers of the conspirators.

Those are the words on which the accusation against Cæsar is founded that he is a puffed-up, theatrical boaster. "With too much levity of mind and without scruples in his very deficient knowledge of the facts he set out to portray Cæsar," says Brandes, "and as he made Jeanne d'Arc a witch, he made Cæsar a braggart !" We have already indicated that in a modern play this kind of self-contemplation, rising almost to self-worship, could justify

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

this inference. We also know that he who talks so much of his courage generally arouses the suspicion of being a coward.

Against this view, even if for the moment we leave out of consideration Shakespeare's specific kind of dramatic technique, which all this is intended to point out, we must raise the objection that it does not explain how Shakespeare could represent the great Cæsar as a vain and cowardly boaster while making the world resound with his praises. For his arrogance, which critics have also found in the lines

What is now amiss  
That Cæsar and his senate must redress ?

III, i, 32

a passage of Plutarch has been adduced which tells of Cæsar's occasionally treating this body with disdain ; and for the self-assurance, bordering on conceit, which appears in his words about his sublime position among men a remark made by Suetonius—whom Shakespeare never drew upon—has been held responsible which says that he had declared "his words should be regarded as laws" (*cf.* Mich. MacMillan's introduction to the "Arden" Shakespeare, p. xxv *seq.*). But what is the significance of these scanty data in comparison with the information about Cæsar which Shakespeare could gather from Plutarch ? Still less importance can we attach to the reference to Cæsar (already brushed aside by Brandes) made by Rosalind in *As You Like It*, where in her usual roguish manner she calls the famous "I came, saw, and overcame" "Cæsar's thrasonical brag," for this remark is, of course, made in a quite jocular sense and connexion. We might as well here throw into the balance the words of good old Falstaff (*2 Henry IV*, III), who, having had a success quite unexpected by himself on the field of battle in capturing a live prisoner, expresses his pride in the words : "I may justly say with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome : I came, saw, and overcame" (*2 Henry IV*, IV, iii). Further, we shall have to ask why Shakespeare, if he really intended to depict Cæsar as a coward or boaster, does not make a single one



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of the conspirators (who are so eager to discover his weaknesses) utter the slightest word about these qualities. Why does even Cassius, his most deadly enemy, call him a lion (even though he uses this expression only because his hatred makes him regard the others as deer)? Brutus goes so far (II, i) as to testify, in plain words :

. . . to speak truth of Cæsar  
I have not known when his affections sway'd  
More than his reason.

II, i, 19

This, coming from Shakespeare's own mouth, is extraordinary praise, as many parallel passages show.

All these circumstances seem to indicate that we are on the right tack in regarding the self-characterization of Julius Cæsar as not dissimilar to the other cases in which the dramatic self-explanation bears a much more primitive character than the more advanced sides of Shakespearean art would at first make us inclined to suspect. In these instances we may even see survivals of the primitive conventionalized art, in which the figures have scrolls with the so-called 'legend' ('I am . . .') hanging out of their mouths. In this case there was a special reason for relapsing so signally from a realistic to a conventionalized art-form. The American scholar Ayres<sup>1</sup> has shown that there exists a dramatic tradition in the representation of Julius Cæsar which originates from a Cæsar-drama in Latin by Muret (1544). In it Cæsar is clearly drawn after the figure of the Hercules Cætæus of Seneca. The vainglorious language is the same in both cases. Muret's example has been followed by the later Cæsar-dramas, of which that by the Italian Pescetti (Verona, 1594) contains such striking analogies to Shakespeare's play that a connexion between them by means of a common source is clearly recognizable. We may therefore assume that Shakespeare had before him an older play which also followed the tradition just mentioned, and which made Cæsar use the same kind of language.

<sup>1</sup> Publications of the Modern Language Assoc. of America, xxv (1910) p. 183 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Shakespeare, by accepting it, intermingled with the realism of his representation an alien element, which at least in his case should not be interpreted realistically, for the reasons already adduced. No doubt the information which Cæsar gives of himself is meant by Shakespeare to correspond exactly with his real character. It would not surprise us if we heard it uttered by another person about Cæsar. It perfectly agrees with what we are told in other passages about the man who has become a god, the "colossus" who

should get the start of the majestic world,  
And bear the palm alone.

Evidently, however, there is no intention of charging Cæsar with the odium of vanity or vainglory because he says these things. There is as little reason for regarding Cæsar as a braggart on account of the praises he applies to himself as there is to style Iago or Cloten in *Cymbeline* (III, v, 113) cynics merely because they talk of their own behaviour as "knavery" or "villainy." Here again we reach the limits of realism and are faced by a dramatic tradition of an unrealistic type similar to that which allows the villain to take the audience into his confidence. At the same time there is no denying that Cæsar is meant to show self-esteem and pride. Above all, Shakespeare cannot imagine this great figure without a great measure of pathos in his speeches, the same kind of pathos which is frequently associated in his mind with the idea of classical antiquity. Here it appears in a peculiarity of Cæsar's diction in passages which undoubtedly are due to Shakespeare's own invention. He likes to speak of himself in the third person ("Cæsar shall forth," and other similar expressions). This circumstance has induced serious students of Shakespeare to regard it as possible that Shakespeare has naïvely followed Cæsar's book on the Gallic War, where he always speaks of himself in the third person and calls himself by name. A glance into the historical plays, however, would have been sufficient to show that Shakespeare also makes other great figures, who have not written any historical treatises in the third

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

person, speak of themselves in the same manner whenever they grow pathetic, as, for example, Richard II :

What must the king do now ? Must he submit ?

The king shall do it : must he be deposed ?

The king shall be contented : must he lose

The name of king ?

III, 2, 143

Or :

Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit,

And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit !

IV, i, 218<sup>1</sup>

The difference between these cases and that of Cæsar is that in him this trait is more strongly emphasized, just as his self-characterization, compared with the instances mentioned above, is more obtrusive. We may perhaps add that from this trait we can infer the manner in which Cæsar ought to be acted. He is not conceivable without an extraordinary display of pathos. This adherence to tradition can in many cases be secured only by avoiding the realistic style, a departure which would strike us nowadays as highly artificial. But be this as it may, the example shows that if we wish to know how the author himself wants us to understand his characters we must in every case look closely at what they say about themselves, and we ought to take these utterances far more seriously, and see in them a more direct expression of the author's intention than our modern dramatic technique would allow us to do.

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, *King Lear* (I, iv, 276 seq.), *Antony and Cleopatra* (IV, xiii, 14 seq.), etc.

## II

### THE REFLECTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE MINDS OF OTHER PERSONS

THE REFLECTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN HARMONY WITH THE REAL CHARACTER OF THE SPEAKER (CORIOLANUS; TROILUS).—Of even greater importance for the dramatist than the direct analysis of character is the device of throwing light upon the nature of the *dramatis personæ*, especially of the central figure, by means of the statements made by the other actors. This side of Shakespeare's art has no special interest for us so far as it comprises technical details which are more or less used by all dramatists. We are not surprised, for example, when in the exposition of Coriolanus a mob of seditious citizens appears on the stage (I, i) and makes the titular hero the principal object of its wrath, so that we at once learn from its words that "Caius Marcius is a very dog to the commonalty" (I, i, 23); that he has undoubtedly rendered his country great services, but that his pride is beyond belief. We even find nothing extraordinary in being at once informed about that characteristic which in the later development of events is to assume such importance, his uncommon devotion and tenderness toward his mother. The play agrees with many others, both old and new, good and bad, in this kind of information about the figure which is soon to occupy the central place in the drama. This form may be more or less artistically utilized, presenting a fully developed dramatic structure, as in this case, or it may degenerate into a kind of descriptive introductory speech, which saves a good deal of actual character revelation, an artistic device conspicuously

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

employed, for example, by Shakespeare's contemporaries, Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher.

What specially distinguishes Shakespeare from these authors, however, is that he applies this method of characterization to figures whom he wishes to be properly understood in all parts of the drama, not merely in the exposition. The fact itself has often been noticed. But the great importance which this technical device has in many cases for the correct explanation of the character has been ignored because the realistic element in its application, as is shown later on, was overestimated, and things which really form part of the careful characterization of the central figure were considered as serving to throw light upon the secondary speaker himself or merely to enliven the dialogue. We must admit that Shakespeare, in this feature as in many others, is not quite consistent with his own practice. In some of his plays he makes an extraordinary use of this device, in others he has little of it. In all cases, however, a judicious interpretation of his characters will have to start *not with the action* (cf. Chapter IV, 5), *but with the questions What do the characters say about themselves? and What do the others say about them?*<sup>c</sup>

We shall see that in this manner we obtain a more objective method of explanation than was possible before.

The case of Troilus is especially instructive. Here Shakespeare represents the story of the love of the Trojan prince for the frivolous daughter of Calchas, whom he wins by the help of her officious uncle Pandarus. After the very first night, however, he loses her through her being handed over in an exchange of hostages to the Greeks, in whose camp the fickle lady too quickly transfers her favour to Diomedes. Now it is true that Troilus in the beginning of his courtship makes a very youthful impression, being over head and ears in love, violent in his excitement, full of feverish sensuality, and immoderate in his anticipated rapture. When the beloved is left alone with him his lack of experience makes him unable to achieve his end. While every fibre of his body is trembling to possess her his excitement suggests to him only stilted

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

phrases in the fashionable taste of that time, in which his innermost nature finds no expression, so that it is she who must break the ice by offering him her mouth to be kissed. After he has come to himself, however, his real character appears. It is severely put to the proof by the unexpected order which, on the morning after their night of love, removes Cressida to the Grecian camp. It is the fate of Romeo which befalls him. But Romeo shows on this occasion how weak and sentimental is the core of his nature. He throws himself on the ground, tears out his hair, and behaves like a madman. Friar Laurence has to prevent him from committing suicide. Troilus acts quite differently. He is a man. It is true he is thunderstruck by the news, and rudely shaken out of his dreams of rapture. But he does not indulge in profitless complaints, and envy the flies, as Romeo does, which still may kiss "the white wonder" of his beloved's hand. He sets his teeth and looks the inevitable in the face, though at the time the sacrifice he has to make cuts him to the quick. All the more does he suffer when the fear begins to trouble him that he may lose Cressida's heart also. It is not actual jealousy which moves him, though in reality he has more reason to be jealous than his unsuspecting nature can imagine. His distrust of her is derived only from the low estimation which he has of himself. He shows his noble modesty in fearing that he cannot rival the elegant culture and the high social arts of the Greeks in whose midst she must now live. A childish simplicity and unpretentiousness lies in this thought of a man who in council is regarded by his friends as equal to any one of them, and in battle is admired as a lion by all.

Chance then leads him sooner than he could expect into the Grecian camp. Here his heart draws him to Cressida. But he is compelled to witness a scene which freezes the blood in his veins. In the sultry night he sees and hears the infatuated woman engaged in certain love-passages with the coarse and experienced Diomedes, about the conclusion of which there can be no doubt. He greedily takes in the whole scene, which is enacted

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

in close proximity to him, until he starts trembling. His disillusion is so overwhelming that he requires a certain time to grasp it all. The foundation of his ideal world is so firmly laid that it refuses to come tumbling down, but, after exploding, remains suspended, as it were, in mid-air. At last, however, when he is no longer able to shut out the testimony of his own eyes, all his dreams come crashing down with a tremendous upheaval of his whole emotional life. He is seized by an inexpressible disgust, which spreads even to things he had so far regarded as his most sacred possessions : "Think we had mothers !"

No more sentimental thoughts awake in him. A letter from her, which is brought to him, he tears up without compunction. He is done with her. A change has been effected in him which will last for the rest of his life. To Cressida this event is only the first of many similar experiences, to Troilus it will remain final and decisive, at any rate as regards his emotional life. Whatever was still youthful in him has been matured by this experience, which has made a man of him. The last sentimental stirrings have been silenced, and upon his boyish face the inner revolution has imprinted a touch of hardness which will never again disappear from it. On the field of battle all shall see this new quality of his character. When Hector falls he steps into his place.

It is very curious that a number of critics do not take this figure quite seriously. Even Kreyssig in his lectures on Shakespeare (3rd ed., Berlin, 1877, p. 409 *seq.*) thinks that the hero in his love must become an object of derision and pity, and Brandes, who speaks of him as "the good fellow, the simpleton" (pp. 713, 746), appears to look down ironically upon the whole misfortune of Troilus from the high standpoint of his experience as a man of the world as though he were dealing with a story by Compton Mackenzie. Shakespeare, he thinks, just coldly describes the awakening of Troilus from his intoxication, but is utterly unable to interest us in it, and does not even want to do so. Just as remarkable is the view of Wolff, who sees Troilus almost exclusively from the comic side. He

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS \*

finds that in the love of the Trojan the line between the sublime and the ridiculous has been overpassed, compares him with Don Quixote because of his infatuated disregard of actuality, and pours out the vials of his derision over the "unpretentious youth" who allows himself to be deceived by a woman like Cressida (ii, 311 *seq.*): We may safely assert, however, that this interpretation is wide of the mark. All these critics have in mind only the beginning of the love-affair and the wooing, which are treated somewhat ironically by the author. But these are only the first steps, and we have to ask ourselves how far this characterization belongs to the category, treated later on (Chapter IV, 3), of the conception of character differing in different scenes. The real nature of Troilus appears only after Cressida has become his own, and it is seen most clearly in the great disillusion. That a man should be deceived because of his idealistic and trusting character is in itself neither comical nor a disgrace—rather the contrary; for the cold and calculating realist will never be afflicted in this manner. Whoever regards as ridiculous a man lacking experience in intercourse with dissolute or wanton women gives himself a character which nobody will envy him. Further, to be blinded by passion and rendered incapable of true judgment is not a sign of stupidity. And, finally, we may doubt the psychological capacity of a critic who regards a disillusion like that of Troilus as too trivial to attribute any great effect to it.

Other, especially Anglo-Saxon, investigators (*cf.* John S. P. Tatlock, in the Publications of the Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America, 30, p. 673 *seq.*) place the love between Troilus and Cressida in too low a sphere, and the openly expressed, strong ingredient of sensuality in it evidently offends their 'refined' taste. No arguing is possible against this attitude. Quite the contrary view is upheld by Volkelt, who has rightly compared in his *Æsthetics of Tragedy* (3rd ed., p. 278) "the pitiable destruction of Troilus' boundless love by Cressida's shameful faithlessness" with the tragic fate of Othello, and with Hebbel's *Judith*.

But is there no imaginable possibility of finding material



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to prove how Shakespeare himself wished this character to be understood? There is, in fact, an unassailable method, offering a double way of approach to the problem, namely, from the side of direct self-explanation as well as from that of reflection of character. As regards the first of these ways, we find Troilus replying to the question of Cressida, whether he will remain faithful to her, in the following detailed contemplation of his own self :

Alas ! it is my vice, my fault :  
Whiles others fish with craft for great opinion,  
I with great truth catch mere simplicity ;  
Whilst some with cunning gild their copper crowns,  
With truth and plainness I do wear mine bare.  
Fear not my truth ; the moral of my wit  
Is : ' plain and true ' ; there's all the reach of it.

IV, iv, 101

This characterization must be taken quite seriously, just like the above-mentioned parallel passages, and if rightly understood ought to induce even a critic like Brandes to abandon his impression that here we have to do with a mere simpleton ; for it is plain what great stress is laid on the integrity and sterling quality of this character. Fortunately, the general features of this character as given here are completed in the clearest possible manner by its reflection in the minds of others. The following words are put into the mouth of Ulysses (IV, v, 96), whose voice throughout the play is the voice of wisdom itself. To the question of Agamemnon, "What Trojan is that same that looks so heavy?" he replies :

The youngest son of Priam, a true knight ;  
Not yet mature, yet matchless ; firm of word,  
Speaking in deeds, and deedless in his tongue ;  
Not soon provok'd, nor being provok'd soon calm'd :  
His heart and hand both open and both free ;  
For what he has he gives, what thinks he shows ;  
Yet gives he not till judgment guide his bounty,  
Nor dignifies an impure thought with breath.  
Manly as Hector, but more dangerous ;  
For Hector, in his blaze of wrath, subscribes

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

To tender objects ; but he in heat of action  
Is more vindictive than jealous love.  
They call him Troilus, and on him erect  
A second hope, as fairly built as Hector.  
Thus says Æneas ; one that knows the youth  
Even to his inches, and with private soul  
Did in great Ilion thus translate him to me.

It is difficult to see how a conception which regards him as "an honest fellow" and "an unpretentious youth" can be made to agree with this minute psychological analysis, which purposely and carefully endeavours to give a clear and firm outline to the spectator's idea of Troilus. We perceive that some of the highest human qualities known to Shakespeare are united in this picture—nay, it is not difficult to see in these words the description of an ideal figure. Can we therefore suppose that Shakespeare would treat with coldness a hero whom he so highly praises and respects, or that he would go the length of making him a comic figure in love ?

2. MISLEADING REFLECTION OF CHARACTERS. THE VILLAINS' DESCRIPTION OF THE HEROES (OLIVER, EDMUND, IAGO).—In cases like the one just discussed we notice how careful the dramatist is to throw the brightest possible light upon his principal figures, especially when they are, or seem to be, in danger of appearing in a false light. We cannot fail to see, however, that in other instances this endeavour must lead directly to psychological inconsistencies. An explanation of character of the kind described has its narrow natural limits ; these are determined by what Otto Ludwig, who has already noted this device in Shakespeare's work, called "their characteristic points of view." It seems to be self-evident that everyone regards people and things as they must appear to his individual vision, that the clear and sober reasoner judges impartially, that passion warps the judgment, that lovers idolize the object of their affection, and that hatred makes a monster of the opponent. Instances of this could be found in Shakespeare's writings also. The representation of Julius Cæsar, for example, as given by Cassius under the influence

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of his deadly hatred may to a certain extent be regarded as such a caricature. But on looking closer we again recognize a certain primitive side of Shakespearean art in the fact that this necessary and indispensable point of view is not consistently maintained, that the statements in this respect need not necessarily be in harmony with the character, that the degree of impartiality does not always depend on the peculiarity of the character. Here again we touch *the limits of Shakespearean realism*. Just as he maintains the fiction that the villains are all perfectly aware of their wickedness and look at it from an outside point of view, as he makes his heroes give descriptions of themselves which are true to fact, so he makes his villains frequently do justice to their victims in quite impartial judgments. This clearly appears in three cases which are very similar to one another. In *As You Like It* there are two brothers, an elder one, the wicked, treacherous Oliver, and a younger one, the noble Orlando. The elder brother compasses the younger one's death and lays a cunning plot to entrap him. In *King Lear* the situation is almost exactly the same: Gloster has two sons, the high-minded Edgar and the bastard Edmund. The latter hatches a wicked plot to destroy his brother. In *Othello*, finally, Iago, the ensign, invents a devilish intrigue in order to deprive his superior, the noble-hearted Moor, of his happiness and position. In all these three cases we are presented with abject creatures who shrink from no mean action which can further their wicked designs. Oliver and the Bastard are unsuccessful, and fortune favours their foul practices only for a little while, whereas Iago's wickedness really triumphs over the unsuspecting nature of his opponent. The greater the meanness of these villains, the more remarkable we must consider the manner in which they acknowledge the worth of their victims. Oliver, who with hypocritical and calumnious words tries to get men to murder his brother, and even seeks to burn him alive, yet says of him: "Yet he's gentle, never school'd and yet learned, full of noble desire, of all sorts enchantingly beloved . . ." (I, i, 172).

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

At once the spectator feels inclined to object: this is no longer true to reality. We can hardly imagine that anyone who persecutes another with so ungovernable a hatred and gladly calls every kind of treachery and iniquity to his aid is able to pass such an impartial judgment upon him and praise him so highly. It must be admitted, however, that in this case an attempt is made to give a psychological justification for this behaviour, the hatred of the villain being explained by his recognizing superior qualities in the other person which rouse his envy. For Oliver goes on to say: "He [*i.e.*, Orlando] is so much in the heart of the world and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised." So plausible, indeed, is this motive that a critic like Wetz (p. 181) has not been able to find any fault in the psychological analysis here. He thinks that the reason for the knavish intrigues is to be sought finally in Orlando's virtues, and he finds a confirmation in the fact that his villainous brother, according to the author's express statement, is not driven to his actions by avarice. This explanation might, indeed, pass muster. But what makes us regard it with suspicion is the exact parallel in *King Lear* (I, ii, 199). There we recognize in Edmund a thoroughly unscrupulous villain, who hardly thinks it necessary in any way to palliate his baseness. Perceiving that customary morality, which slights him because of his supposedly inferior origin, is unjust and senseless, he disdains no means, not even the most infamous, which will help him to thrust aside all obstacles in the way of his rise to power. As Fr. Th. Vischer aptly remarks, "he revenges himself on his father by taking for his guide that unbridled instinct which called him into being, and so turning himself into an out-and-out villain." Of attractive personal appearance and dangerous to women, his callousness is equalled only by his cunning. He begins his criminal career by forging a letter which serves to oust his noble brother from the heart and home of his father and to make him a hunted fugitive. Next, his treachery draws down a still more terrible fate upon his father himself, that of

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

having his eyes put out and being sent into exile. But here too Shakespeare introduces the trait which Oliver in *As You Like It* shows of being quite impartial toward his victim. He expressly states that Edgar is

•  
*A brother noble,  
Whose nature is so far from doing harms  
That he suspects none.*

I, ii, 199

•  
We may be certain that an abject rascal like Edmund would never make this confession of admiration, the false impartiality of which is but little modified by the addition,

on whose foolish honesty  
My practices ride easy,

which is more correct from a psychological point of view. We ask ourselves why Shakespeare has put this impartiality, which is quite inconsistent with the rest of the character, into the mouth of the villain. It cannot be explained here, as in the preceding case, by the fact that he is made envious and wicked principally by his recognition of the other man's virtues, for the Bastard does not persecute his good brother on account of his virtues or his popularity, but merely through envy of his possessions and because of his priority of birth. The significance of the explanatory statements in both cases is more easily understood if we consider the places in which they occur in the plays. They are made at the very moment when the intrigue is being set on foot, and form part of the monologue which sums up the resolution of the villain—in *As You Like It* toward the end of the first scene of the first act, in the other play in the last lines of the second scene of the first act. They may thus be considered as belonging to the exposition. Evidently the dramatist has thought it necessary at this stage once more to place before his audience a clear statement of the whole case. In comparison with this aim the slight distortion of the mental physiognomy of the villain was of no great moment; as a matter of fact, it hardly disturbs us.

Of much greater importance to the reader is the case of

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Iago, because it is much more apt to be misinterpreted. Iago in *Othello* is the blackest of all Shakespeare's villains. Here the ability of the dramatist—which in other instances is his strongest point—to raise his figures to a superhuman level threatens to become the cause of his failure ; the effect borders on the inhuman. Shakespeare apparently found in his original material—so much we can see from the Italian tale of Cinthio—a low scoundrel who falls in love with his fair and virtuous mistress, and can explain her resistance to his affection only by suspecting that she loves another, whom he guesses to be the captain in her husband's regiment, and that these two people are united in a guilty attachment. He resolves to make away with his rival, and, his love changing to fierce hatred, he skilfully directs all the resources of his quick and energetic mind to the task of destroying the Moor's love by arousing his jealousy. Various accidental happenings favour him, and he attains his end, assisting the Moor to murder the innocent woman with his own hands. After this deed, however, the hatred of the Moor, who has recovered from his blind fury, turns against him ; he reduces him to the ranks and tries to kill him. The villain forestalls him and informs the captain, who is still alive, suspecting nothing, though he himself has mutilated him in an unsuccessful attempt upon his life which he had been ordered to make by the Moor. On being told that he is a victim of the Moor, the captain reports the murder, which had so far escaped detection, to the senate and thus carries out the revenge of the villain. The Moor has to suffer torture and banishment, and is finally killed by the relations of Desdemona, whereas the villain himself is thrown into prison on account of this and other crimes and there comes to a miserable end. Already in this story certain fundamental traits of the psychological picture of Iago were contained, the coarseness of his view of life, which throws suspicion upon everything that is noble, his utter lack of compassion, his masterly skill in intrigue, his devilish malignity towards a harmless victim. In the tale the motive for his criminal actions against his environment is

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

unquestionably his wounded vanity. In Shakespeare's drama, though in many parts changes have been introduced into the action, the character of Iago has remained pretty much the same. No humane quality has been added to soften the picture. Iago is a devil, inexpressibly mean in his detraction of everything that is noble, a scoffer, and comparable to Thersites in his rejoicing over every kind of wickedness. Employing the device of self-explanation already well known to us, Shakespeare makes him say that he is "nothing if not critical"—*i.e.*, censorious (II, i, 119). He is malicious, and pleased at the misfortunes of others, envious, hard, and unmoved by pity, at the same time cunning, shrewd, and calculating, a master of dissimulation, in every way a *faux bonhomme*. In all circumstances he successfully acts the old soldier with the rough outside and the honest heart. The poet, as we see, has from the outset painted his character in such colours that there is hardly any necessity to supply him with special motives against Othello. Shakespeare, however, shows these to be frustrated ambition, envy, and desire for revenge. Iago believes himself entitled to the position of Cassio, who has been preferred to him, and is indignant at finding himself slighted; he also suspects the Moor of having seduced Emilia, his wife, and wishes to be revenged on him.

Now it is remarkable that, though Iago is such an abject and monstrous villain, though he actually suspects the Moor of misconduct with his wife, he still takes up exactly the same attitude toward his victim as Oliver does toward Orlando in *As You Like It* and Edmund toward Edgar in *King Lear*; *i.e.*, he testifies in one of his monologues that

The Moor is of a free and open nature,

I, iii, 405

and further :

The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,  
*Is of a constant, loving, noble nature ;*  
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona  
A most dear husband.

II, i, 296

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Here again the technical device of character-reflection appears in its old-fashioned and naïve form. It is absolutely impossible that Iago could believe Othello to have deceived him and at the same time describe him as loving, upright, true, and noble. Brandes, recognizing this impossibility, tries to explain Iago's reflections on the Moor's adultery as belonging to the class of "partly disingenuous attempts to understand himself, being nothing but self-explanations which serve to palliate his own wickedness." We know, however, from the other cases which we have studied how rightly to estimate this reference to the central figure of the play. We have seen that it does not justify any conclusions whatever as to the character of the speaker. On the contrary, its only purpose is to characterize the person to whom it refers.

What we have learnt from these passages will help us further to form a better judgment of another case in which a villain makes remarks about his victim. This is Macbeth. The murderer here pays this tribute to King Duncan:

. . . this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off.

I, vii, 17

The view may be taken here that there is no psychological improbability in Macbeth making the character of his victim one of the warring motives in his struggle with his own resolve. Much less convincing, however, is the ungrudging recognition and boundless admiration which he expresses in his monologue of Banquo, his other victim, praising in him his "royalty of nature" and the "dauntless temper of his mind" (III, i, 48). As Macbeth is a 'problematic nature' engaged in conflicts even within his own soul, we might possibly regard this praising of his opponents as a subtle trait intentionally added to his portrait; but the comparison with the other cases distinctly shows that the real purport of this passage is the same as in those. *We clearly see that the villains in Shakespeare are*



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

*not allowed to appear as honest characters even in their own eyes, and that the noble characters must be noble even in the eyes of their wicked enemies.* This is an astonishing example of the great contrasts between which the art of Shakespeare oscillates. The pendulum is ever swinging from the side of a highly advanced realism, unfettered by any tradition, which allows characters instinctively conceived to work out their relations in unrestricted liberty, to the side where there exists an almost childish primitiveness and a submission to traditional practice utterly regardless of the actual facts of life.

103. THE QUESTION OF A SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT IN THE REFLECTION OF CHARACTERS IN OTHER MINDS (LAERTES ON HAMLET'S LOVE, LADY MACBETH ON THE CHARACTER OF HER HUSBAND; THE PRINCIPLE OF THE OBJECTIVE APPROPRIATENESS OF DRAMATIC TESTIMONY).—We have now gained an impression of the primitive and utterly unrealistic devices which Shakespeare allows himself whenever he wishes to attain a certain end. Our eyes are therefore opened to perceive a similar state of affairs in other places. Above all we observe that, as a rule, the poet is very careful, especially in the exposition, not to mislead us about the behaviour and the character of the hero by the remarks of persons who have a wrong or biased conception of him and who by expressing it might put the spectator on the wrong tack. A contradiction of this view may be found in the passage, already referred to, at the beginning of *Julius Cæsar* (I, ii) where Cassius gives instances of the emperor miserably failing in certain tests of his physical endurance—how in a swimming-match he had saved his life only by a piteous appeal to the man whom he himself had challenged to the adventure, and how during an attack of fever in Spain he had whined like a sick girl. A further transgression of this principle seems to occur in the first mention we have of Othello from the mouth of Iago, who most slanderously represents him (I, i) as full of presumption and bombast. On looking closer, however, it is seen that no one among the spectators can possibly have any doubt from the very beginning about the true characters of these two speakers

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

and the nature of their remarks. As was shown above, the presupposition in the case of Julius Cæsar is his superhuman greatness, and Cassius so clearly breathes his hatred against him in every syllable that his words, even though they must be substantially correct, cannot seriously influence the spectator against Cæsar. As for Iago, we hear him, the moment after his disparaging remarks about Othello, so distinctly explaining his own scoundrelly character in the naïve manner illustrated above (*cf.* p. 36), and so expressly calling himself a false and faithless servant of his master, that his criticism, in like manner, cannot leave any doubt as to its essential worthlessness.

A very different case is presented by the remarks which at the beginning of *Hamlet* Laertes makes to Ophelia about Hamlet's love. This is done at a time when we have already gained a very definite impression of Hamlet's character, especially through his behaviour in the great audience scene, and have already been well informed about the close attachment existing between him and Horatio. About Ophelia, on the other hand, we have not as yet heard anything. Laertes, who now appears on the stage, is a figure who has only once for a short moment passed across our field of vision, when in the Presence he makes his polite and gentlemanly request to be allowed to return to France. The words which in this private interview he addresses to his sister exhibit him at once in a most favourable light. He shows his genuine brotherly affection by asking his sister not to leave him without news from her. Then he comes to speak of a thing which greatly occupies his mind. And here we are first told of Hamlet's love for Ophelia. It is most significant, however, that the brother does not take the matter itself very seriously, though it appears to him to be serious enough for his sister :

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,  
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,  
A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute ;  
No more.

I, iii, 5

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

In no way does he regard Hamlet as an ill-intentioned or especially heartless seducer. He willingly admits that:

Perhaps he loves you now ;  
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
The virtue of his will.

Nevertheless, he feels himself obliged to warn her, as he does not see any good in a love-affair in which his sister has everything to lose and nothing to gain. Numerous critics of *Hamlet* have become accustomed to censure this opinion of Laertes as altogether unprincipled, superficial, and undignified, viewing the relation between Hamlet and Ophelia in the light of the later development of events. But let us for a moment put aside all the later scenes and ask ourselves what interest Shakespeare could have had in giving the first information of the relation existing between the two in a distorted form, when we have always found him endeavouring to facilitate as much as possible the audience's understanding of all that concerns the action. Now the words of Laertes will appear to every unprejudiced reader or spectator as being more or less justified. He wins our approval by the serious manner in which he explains the reason for his anxiety, not in the least like a mere empty-headed boy who judges others by himself. Under these circumstances there is really no reason to doubt, if we understand Shakespeare's technique, that the remarks of Laertes are substantially correct. The point then is one of fundamental importance, and all the more so as this view is not rendered untenable in any way by that which follows.

A number of critics are convinced that Hamlet is passionately in love with Ophelia; e.g., Löning (p. 225) considers him to be animated by the deepest love all through the play. Gertrud Landsberg, however (cf. *Ophelia, die Entstehung der Gestalt und ihre Deutung*, Cöthen, 1918), has very aptly shown that all these explanations based on subjective impressions can be more thoroughly tested by referring them to the dramatic history of this love-affair. She proves that in the German *Hamlet—Fratricide Punished*—which is probably to be regarded as a

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

crude and distorted copy of the model which Shakespeare used, there is no love-affair worth talking about. We are even compelled to suppose that in the play which Shakespeare took for his starting-point Ophelia, so to speak, formed part of the other side. She is not, or at any rate she is *no longer*, his friend, but belongs to the royal party who are his enemies. Any presents of his which she may possess are souvenirs of a past time, when the dazzling young prince had paid his court to the pretty girl and had perhaps even been in love with her. But Ophelia has never really loved him. The utmost she may have done has been to tolerate his homage. When he appears to have lost his reason, and she notices that her father and the King are no longer well disposed toward him, she goes over to their side as a matter of course, without reflecting, and more or less faithless, in accordance with the relations which have previously existed between them (p. 56 *seq.*).

This part of Ophelia, if we consider the construction which Kyd gave to the drama, was to a certain extent a dramatic necessity. It is true in the original story which Kyd made use of the woman who takes the place of Ophelia appears in agreement with the Prince. This situation, however, he could not well take over without carrying on the love-intrigue, which in the story dies a natural death and for which there is no room in *Hamlet*, this play being already overburdened with side-plots. The only alternative which remains to him, if he does not wish to encumber himself with a love-intrigue not required by the main action, is to represent Ophelia in the eavesdropping scene as *not* in agreement with Hamlet. By this arrangement the nature of their relation is determined. The only choice still open to him was to attribute the readiness with which she allows herself to be used as a decoy to ill-will or weakness. It is easily understood that he preferred the latter motive, because of its greater simplicity, which makes it an aid to the economy of the drama. The nucleus of this affair Shakespeare transplanted unchanged from the old drama into his play, with the only difference that his unrivalled art clothed the languishing flirtation in

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

a garb of poetry which in words only half-expressed charms us by a melting sweetness and allows us no time to realize how little all this means to the persons concerned. This fact has already been discovered and convincingly proved by Gertrud Landsberg from the point of view of Ophelia ; but even when looking through Hamlet's eyes we cannot see the situation in any other light.

A further contradiction of the view that Hamlet is passionately in love with Ophelia can be found in his ardent wish to return to the University of Wittenberg, from which he can be dissuaded only by the urgent requests of the King and Queen. Above all, why does he never refer to her with a single word in those soliloquies in which all the anguish of his soul is revealed ? It is also surprising how little there is in his love-letter to Polonius' daughter (II, ii) of that language of deep passion which is at his disposal on other occasions, even in the protestation of friendship which he makes to Horatio. Shakespeare gives us a clear indication of how he wishes Hamlet's mental disposition to be regarded when he makes the cunning King Claudius, after listening to the conversation of the two (III, i), exclaim :

Love ? his affections do not that way tend !

It is undoubtedly true that later on, at Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet gets into a high state of excitement and in a kind of frenzy hurls his passionate love in the faces of the bystanders. Yet not only do they at once recognize his behaviour to be thoroughly morbid, but he himself afterward confirms this opinion by pleading in excuse of his conduct a momentary outburst of passion due to his madness (V, ii). Even if we do Shakespeare's technique so little justice as to see no reference to fact in this statement, we cannot shut our eyes to the perception that Hamlet in private conversation with Horatio (V, ii) sees these things essentially in the same way. He does not think for a moment of describing his behaviour to Horatio as due to any excessive pain caused by Ophelia's death. On the contrary, he says not a word about her, but states expressly

70

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

that "the bravery [*i.e.*, the ostentation] of his [*i.e.*, Laertes'] grief" has roused him to "a towering passion" and thus brought about the "fit" (V, ii, 79). This account perfectly agrees with the peculiarity of the melancholy temperament, that its victim is infuriated by the idea that anyone else wants to be more unhappy than himself (*cf.* p. 160). We therefore see that the view of Laertes in the beginning of the play hits the mark. As regards the Queen's remark that she would gladly have seen Ophelia as Hamlet's bride, we cannot attach great importance to it. Such statements we shall find explained later on as belonging to what we may call Shakespeare's "tendency to episodic intensification" (*cf.* p. 113 *seq.*). All this confirms the view which is of the utmost importance, *that the first mention in the drama of things which are important for the action or the characterization of the central figure must never be allowed in the interest of the characterization of secondary figures to distort the representation of the facts.*

A much more complicated case is presented by the remarks made by Lady Macbeth with reference to her husband. Macbeth is a character at variance with himself, drawn in opposite directions by conflicting tendencies. For this reason numerous critics speak of the struggle which he has to carry on against his own conscience. But against this view it has been very properly objected that conscience speaks only with a very small voice in Macbeth's bosom, conscience, of course, meaning here the moral reaction of a person against the motives of his own conduct, not the fear of the consequences or the mortification produced by them. It is true that Macbeth is not without a sense of honour, and the meanness of his crime dawns upon him when he reflects before murdering his guest, the old King Duncan, that

he's here in double trust :

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself.

I, vii, 12

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

It is undeniable that what looks like a part of his better nature appears here and also in the passage where a stirring of gratitude seems to act as a check to his dark designs :

We will proceed no further in this business :

He hath honour'd me of late. . . . I, vii, 31

The more probable explanation<sup>6</sup> is, however, that these are mere transitory emotions in the great volcanic upheaval of his soul and not really firm convictions which, in the struggle between good and bad instincts, have gradually been undermined and overthrown. What always occupies the foreground of his thoughts is the fear of the consequences, the idea

If it were done, when 't is done, then 't were well

It were done quickly. I, vii, 1

In the reasons for Macbeth's hesitation the selfish element predominates. The deed itself is not abhorrent to him on moral grounds. Nor is his fear of the consequences in the life after death due to any stirrings of conscience, as Siburg has rightly maintained against Vischer (*Shakespeare Vorträge*, ii, 80). What we find there are cool deliberations whether the deed is advisable or not, shrewd reflections that, as a rule, retribution overtakes the evil-doer already in this life :

. . . that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return

To plague th' inventor. I, vii, 7

Caution warns him that the violent death of the kind old king will arouse in his subjects a measure of compassion most dangerous to the murderer; he becomes apprehensive that he may lose the popularity newly won by his victories; and other more or less practical considerations flash through his mind.

Are we to suppose, then, that Macbeth's mental process is merely a cool, businesslike calculation? Certainly not; but neither is the contrary true, namely, that his is a struggle between good and bad instincts. In reality he is fighting

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

against his own weakness; and it is just in this that we recognize the peculiar Shakespearean quality of the character.

In his original source, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare found a man who was credited with the highest warlike achievements, but whose hardness and cruelty, unusual even for that period, are several times mentioned. Had he dealt with this character more than a decade earlier it would most probably have become a thick-skinned brute of the stamp of Richard III; for, like Schiller, Shakespeare might have said of himself: "The older I get the more my stock of caricatures diminishes." By this time he had passed the youthful stage in which he, like every other man, gets his views of reality from the study of models; he is observing life itself more closely and drawing directly from it; he is especially attracted by hidden psychological correspondences. This makes him study his original in quite a different way; he finds in it that the prophecy of the fatal sisters goes on rankling in the King's mind, and also that the murder of King Duncan is due principally to the instigation of his ambitious wife. It is here that we must look for the germ from which sprang the conception of the character of a man of unusual bravery who yet does not initiate his own actions, but receives and must receive the decisive impulse from without, consequently a man who is dependent on his human environment, in certain aspects a weak man. We can now understand that this problem begins to exert a much greater attraction for Shakespeare at a time when he himself and the public have grown tired of purely historical subjects. Moreover, a sharp contrast of this sort producing cross-currents in a complex mind is what interests him most in this period of his dramatic activity: inborn weakness and the desire for action in Hamlet, tenderest love and the desire to kill in Othello, the supreme strength of the conqueror of the world and doting feebleness in Antony.

In Macbeth we may see, if we choose, a special family likeness to Hamlet, but certainly not his counterpart, as Brandes, copying Gervinus (iii, p. 307 *seq.*), would make him (p. 592). It was Gervinus who first stamped the



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

figure of Macbeth with a character which has been accepted by the most notable among his successors. According to him Macbeth is "a man of the ancient energy of the heroic races," a "heathenish and savage" fellow, he has "the simple and unaffected nature of the true soldier." We find the same view in Ulrici (ii, 113), to whom he appears as a heroic character of ancient Northern strength and endurance; in Kreyssig, who calls him "a simple nature full of primitive energy and robust virility," an "unbroken and unspoiled character" (p. 151 *seq.*); and finally in Brandes, who has largely incorporated Kreyssig's ideas in his own work, and who describes him as a rude, simple warrior, a man of action, whose inclination is to strike and not to engage in long deliberations.

It is interesting to see how these interpreters account for the terrors that haunt Macbeth. The explanation they give is simple enough: these states are due to the "paralysing power of his imagination" (Gervinus, p. 132). "He is bold, he is ambitious, he is a man of action," says H. Cuninghame (in the introduction to the "Arden" edition, xlv), "but he is also, within limits, a man of imagination. Through his vivid imagination he is kept in touch with supernatural impressions and is liable to supernatural fears." Almost the same view was taken by Ulrici (p. 109) of Macbeth's fear of failure, which he attributes to his quick and uncontrollable imagination. But is not this reversing the natural order of things—*i.e.*, mixing up the cause and the effect? Surely there can be no doubt that terrifying visions are produced by fear, not *vice versa*! It is weakness that sees spectres, not strength. Sir Walter Raleigh (1909, p. 17) likewise depicts Macbeth as a character chiefly dominated by imagination, and for this reason puts him in the same category with Richard II and Hamlet. We know, however, that those two figures also are remarkable for their weakness of will (*cf.* p. 168 *seq.*). In itself, as experience shows, imagination is not incompatible with strength. Imaginative people, on the contrary, may act with the utmost temerity. A man, however, in whose imagination terrifying

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

images predominate may safely be regarded as the very opposite of a heroic character of ancient Northern strength and endurance.

The truth is, this whole conception is based upon a misunderstanding. \* It is due to an excessive contemplation of the warlike achievements and personal bravery of the man, and it confounds physical and moral courage. Macbeth certainly is a lion on the field of battle; open and visible dangers leave him unmoved. But this is not incompatible with the fact that, at heart, he is greatly dependent on other people, is always a prey to fear, and feels himself helpless in every moral conflict into which his own actions lead him. This weakness grows out of a nervous disposition which under the influence of strong impressions may produce highly morbid mental states. Naturally these have also been noticed by the critics of Macbeth, for the most part, however, only in those cases where they assume quite grotesque forms, as, for example, when immediately before the murder of Duncan Macbeth is terrified by the image of a bloody dagger hovering in the air in front of his eyes. A more attentive observer, however, will receive a correct impression of Macbeth's character at his very first appearance. To him and Banquo the weird sisters appear on the empty heath and salute him with the threefold title. Their greeting does not cause him any surprise or astonishment, but evidently makes him give such a perceptible start and sends such a shudder through his frame that Banquo, wondering what is the matter, asks him:

Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear  
Things that do sound so fair?

I, iii

If we inquire what is the reason of this tremendous effect produced by the prophetic words upon his whole being, we are told by the critics (Kreyssig, ii, 150; v. Friesen, iii, 162 *seq.*) that it is the sudden revelation, which like a flash of lightning illuminates his soul, of all his secret and slumbering wishes. This is true enough;

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

but the same experience would affect another type of character in quite a different way. Even if a train of thought ending in the idea of a crime were set going in the mind of a criminal he would not necessarily be seized by such a sudden fright, unless he habitually suffered from what the Germans call *Furcht vor der eigenen Courage*. This, indeed, is the mental condition of Macbeth.

It is only after Banquo, perfectly cool and self-possessed, has taken his turn in asking information of the unearthly creatures about his own future and has received his answer that Macbeth recovers from his shock and once more addresses them, but in vain. They disappear, and he is again alone with Banquo. His whole mind is filled with what he has heard. But it is characteristic of him that he does not dare openly to confess what is going on within him. From the very beginning we find something close and suspicious in the man. As Siburg very cleverly remarks, his real motive in observing to Banquo, "Your children shall be kings," is to make his companion repeat once more the dazzling promise. When Banquo promptly replies, "You shall be king," he quickly adds,

And thane of Cawdor too; went it not so?

betraying by his eagerness how little he is thinking of Banquo's future and how much he is occupied with his own fate. This first impression of Macbeth is confirmed and completed by the soliloquy which soon follows. Whereas Banquo has remained perfectly calm at the quick fulfilment of the first prophecy, Macbeth shows the excessive irritability of his nervous system by getting into an extreme state of excitement. We see that the very first emergence of the criminal thought marks the beginning of the fight against his nerves; he speaks of that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
Against the use of nature.

I, iv, 135

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

The emotion, evidently, is so strong that his whole appearance is changed. He is so little able to control himself that his companions, of whom he is entirely oblivious, notice his state and Banquo with great astonishment calls attention to his "rapt" expression (I, iii, 57 and 142), which v. Friesen rightly likens to that of a man who is drunk. The excuse which he then offers them contains an untruth :

Give me your favour : my dull brain was wrought  
With things forgotten.

I, iii, 149

Like all weak characters, Macbeth is a liar. Therefore, when Banquo immediately before the murder scene reminds him of the three weird sisters he replies, disagreeably moved by this thought at this moment : "I think not of them" (II, i, 21). The enormous irritability from which Macbeth suffers leaves its traces on his countenance, which, to the great vexation of his wife, again and again most distinctly reflects the inner workings of his mind. Again and again she is obliged to warn him to put on a different expression (I, iv, 62 *seq.* ; III, ii, 27). When he thinks he sees the ghost of Banquo he completely loses control over his features, and his face becomes so contorted that his wife in a mixture of fear and rage shouts at him :

Shame itself !  
Why do you make such faces ?

III, iv, 66

The critics (Gervinus, Brandes, etc.) find in his inability to control his facial expression an indication of a straightforward and natural character. But we may be certain that Macbeth, who, as we have seen, was not afraid of a lie, would willingly and without any scruples have changed the appearance of his face had he been able to do so. The fact of the matter is, however, that here, as in all other cases, he is a victim of his nerves. No doubt of their diseased condition can arise when we find him suffering from unmistakable hallucinations of the visual and auditory

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

organs, when he sees the bloody dagger, hears voices after the murder, and finally is confronted with the ghost of Banquo, his victim, sitting upon his own chair. The words with which on this last occasion Lady Macbeth addresses the alarmed guests,

Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,  
*And hath been from his youth* : pray you, keep seat ;  
The fit is momentary : upon a thought  
He will again be well,

III, iv, 53

sound like an excuse invented for the moment, and this may be really the case ; but, after all, there is nothing absolutely impossible in the explanation, though it is certain that the fearful excitement consequent upon the second murder has once more caused his natural tendencies to break out with unusual violence.

As Macbeth takes so little account of his nerves we should not be surprised if he fell a victim to them, as he occasionally seems to be on the point of doing, especially as he is tormented by sleeplessness (III, iv). But in the end he becomes master of his over-excited nerves, though not of his inner unrest, which drives him on from crime to crime. He grows accustomed to wickedness, his mind is hardened and at last completely blunted, whereas his wife, who, hard as she is, has over-taxed her nature, goes the opposite way. He himself has the feeling that his frenzied excitement is principally called forth by his inexperience of his murderous trade.

My strange and self-abuse  
Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use :  
We are yet but young in deed,

he says (III, iv, 142) with a certain cynical humour. Finally, however, when he is brought to bay like a wild beast and has to fight for his life, his personal courage once more appears and sends the calm of a firm resolve through his whole nature. We know that weak men often, when no choice remains to them, cast behind them all

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

hesitation and irresolution. Macbeth becomes conscious of the great change which has taken place within him, as we see from the words :

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.  
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd ,  
To hear a night-shriek ; and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir  
As life were in 't. I have supp'd full with horrors :  
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,  
Cannot once start me.

V, v, 9

But this reflection and the courage with which he faces his end cannot conceal from us the extraordinary weakness and lack of assurance which are prominent features of his character. Against these, rather than against any good part of his nature, he struggles. Critics who are unwilling to abandon their belief in the essential nobility of his nature have desperately tried to save their theory by discrediting his words about himself. Henry Cuning-  
ham, for instance, says (p. xlv) that Macbeth's character is not understood either by himself or by Lady Macbeth ; his better nature incorporates itself in images which alarm and terrify instead of speaking to him in the language of moral ideas and commands. This process of disguising his better self, however, quite apart from the psychological improbability, is so complicated and puzzling that we can hardly credit a popular dramatist with employing it. Moreover, we have to ask why this better nature of the hero does not appear on any other occasion. These undeniable facts render improbable any view except the one we have taken. The strongly marked, single ambitious impulses of Macbeth are not co-ordinated into one great and continued effort of will. This peculiarity Shakespeare, true to his usual technique, several times describes in plain words, for example when Macbeth is blamed for being "infirm of purpose" (II, ii, 51), and when he himself speaks of having "no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition" (I, vii, 26), thus comparing himself to a lazy horse requiring to be spurred. We could not imagine

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

a clearer demonstration of this weakness than his wishing, in the very moment when the murder of King Duncan has been effected, that it had never been committed (II, ii, 73).

We must now see how the remarks made by Lady Macbeth about him agree with the view here taken.

It has been explained above that Shakespeare's purpose in having his principal characters reflected in the minds of other persons is to throw sufficient light upon them. We also understand that these various characterizations need not completely harmonize with the characters of the persons by whom they are made. In *Macbeth* this device appears in the exposition in the following manner. After we have gained the first definite impression of Macbeth we are shown his ancestral castle at Inverness. His wife comes on the stage reading the letter which tells her of the prophecies. She has already formed her resolution to help him to realize them. The only thing that troubles her is her own part in this enterprise. Then we are given a clear and detailed outline of Macbeth's character drawn by the person who has his full confidence, the purpose being to complete and confirm the impression we have already received of him :

[Thou] shalt be  
What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature :  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,  
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great ;  
Art not without ambition, but without  
The illness should attend it : what thou wouldst highly,  
That wouldst thou holily ; wouldst not play false,  
And yet wouldst wrongly win ; thou'dst have, great  
Glamis,  
That which cries, " Thus thou must do, if thou have it " ;  
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,  
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thy ear. . . .

I, v, 15

If we ask ourselves whether this characterization hits the mark we must reply in the affirmative, at any rate so far

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

as his actual behaviour is concerned. There can be no doubt that Macbeth does not like playing false. He takes no delight in crimes and lying, as Richard III or Iago do, and immoral actions are not easy to him as they are to Edmund in *King Lear*. Yet he passionately desires that which he is not entitled to claim. He does not wish that King Duncan should not be murdered, but he would prefer this deed to be committed by another, for he is ill at ease in performing it. It is quite a different question, however, whether *the reasons for this behaviour* are correctly stated by Lady Macbeth.

Ulrici (p. 111) evades this difficulty by advancing the naïve opinion, which mixes up art and reality, that a wife must be the best judge of her husband. The matter, however, is far too intricate to allow us to dismiss the task of examining Macbeth's motives with such a cheap and commonplace argument. Besides, is it true that Macbeth would have liked to attain his ends "holily," that he is free from criminal inclinations, that his mind is "full o' the milk of human kindness"? Obviously not. As we have shown above, Macbeth is not entirely devoid of a certain sense of honour; he shows traces of nobler instincts, and is, for example, perfectly aware that the fact of Duncan being his guest renders his crime still more shameful. Also his general weakness of character does not lead him to any really low and contemptible actions, as, for example, reproaching his wife for having driven him on to his crimes. All this, however, is not yet a sign of a truly humane character. His inhumanity and cruelty most distinctly appear in his treatment of the innocent Banquo. Nowhere, in the whole play does Macbeth show the faintest sign of real humanity, certainly not in the indescribable state of horror at his own action into which he is thrown by the assassination of King Duncan. If Macbeth, on account of this experience, were to regard himself as capable of humane sentiments we could find in him the best justification of the saying of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: "Many people believe they are kind-hearted, but in reality they are only weak-nerved." In the case of Macbeth it



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

is not a genuine emotion of pity which betrays itself in his state, but only the immense agitation of a man whose constitution punishes him through a feverish state of internal unrest for having overstepped the physical limits set to his will.

Moreover, as regards the influence which Lady Macbeth has upon him, it is easily seen that she does not think of combating his goodness of heart and moral scruples, but that, on the contrary, she spurs him to action by taunting him with his cowardice and weakness of will. If this procedure were based, as Cuninghame thinks, on a misunderstanding of his character—*i.e.*, on her underestimating his moral worth—we should have to feel very much surprised at her success. It is clear, therefore, that she does not need to fear any opposition due to native goodness of heart. All this justifies the conclusion that the characterization given by Lady Macbeth does not fit the Macbeth whom we know. The attempt which Ulrici has made to apply it to Macbeth as he was *before* the appearance of the witches is a makeshift which, for very obvious reasons, is hardly worth serious discussion. It might be argued that the poet by means of these remarks wished to characterize Lady Macbeth herself rather than her husband. The question to be decided is, then, whether Lady Macbeth really sees and judges her husband in this manner. Many readers may be inclined to take this view and explain the passage in the sense that Lady Macbeth, as a good wife, tries to shut her eyes to her husband's weakness by representing it as goodness of heart. Or it might be said that, being wicked herself, she mistakes for good nature what is only the weakness of her companion. Such an explanation is in itself quite feasible. We should be able to justify these words, if not by the facts themselves, at any rate by the psychological peculiarity of the speaker. Unfortunately this view is rendered quite untenable by the extraordinary clearness with which Lady Macbeth judges her husband throughout the rest of the play. It is not at all true that she takes a rosy-coloured view of his character. In passages which do not serve the purpose of inciting him to

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

action or inflaming his evil passions she finds no word to represent him as better than he really is. There is thus no reason why she should embellish his character here. All this points to the conclusion that we must assume *the possibility of a certain misrepresentation or error of characterization* which is not without analogy (cf. pp. 213, 221). *The poet for a moment misjudges his own creation.* For, taking into consideration Shakespeare's peculiar technique, we cannot doubt for a moment that he means the character of the hero to be objectively described in the monologue.

This last principle must never be lost sight of in explaining the action of the Shakespearean drama, but equally necessary is another, which does not allow of any errors of characterization, viz., *that positive statements made by any person about happenings which we have not ourselves witnessed on the stage are to be regarded as unquestionably correct.* Macbeth affords us a good instance. As the destined course of the hero is approaching its last crisis (V, v) we are very briefly informed of the Queen's death. Lamentations are heard behind the scenes, and the message comes that the Queen is dead, the messenger bringing Macbeth a remarkably brief report of not more than three words. Macbeth, however, does not ask for any further particulars. The matter is settled for him with the words :

She should have died hereafter :

There would have been a time for such a word.

V, v, 17

Afterward, when the victors enter the captured castle, we learn from the mouth of the new king what has happened—that the “fiendlike queen”

As 'tis thought, by self and violent hands  
Took off her life.

V, vii, 100

It is most curious that a number of critics (Vischer, Wolff) assume Shakespeare to have left it obscure and undecided whether Lady Macbeth has really committed suicide or

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

not ; one critic (Cunningham) bases his doubts not only upon the words "as 'tis thought" of the text, but also upon the personality of the speaker, whom he alleges to be an untrustworthy witness, being a mortal enemy of Lady Macbeth. These subtleties, however, lead us nowhere. They have their origin, as do most others, in a failure to distinguish between art and reality. Such interpretations may be admissible in dealing with actual happenings of real life ; the processes of imagination, however, which are due to choice and creation, we can explain only by keeping in mind what purpose each of them has to fulfil in an organic whole. A remark like that made by the King in this final epilogue would have no purpose whatever if it did not serve to communicate a fact. Its introduction by "as 'tis thought" is due to the situation : the speaker and his followers have not been in the enemy's camp when the event occurred.

This passage may be insignificant in itself, but it acquires a certain theoretical importance by the astonishing explanation of the scholars to whom we are indebted for the Clarendon edition. They recommend that this passage be omitted, because, in their opinion, Shakespeare, having filled his audience with pity for Lady Macbeth and made them feel that she has really expiated her crime by the retribution following it, would not have destroyed this sympathy by calling her "the fiendlike queen" and by lifting the veil which he himself had tactfully spread over her fate, a result inevitably produced by the communication that she "by self and violent hands took off her life." This explanation is not convincing. The Elizabethan audience should not be regarded as so tender-hearted that they would be likely to have any sympathy for the blood-stained murderess merely because she was ill and inwardly broken. Moreover, a view like this takes no notice of the inexorable manner in which the Shakespearean tragedy makes the villains drain the bitter cup to the lees. Neither Aaron, nor King Claudius, nor Edmund, nor Goneril and Regan receive any remission of punishment, and actual suicide is only the consummation of that spiritual

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

self-destruction wrought by evil which Shakespeare loves to represent.

The greatest error, however, is contained in the view that in lifting the veil from the fate of the Queen Shakespeare would have committed an artistic mistake with which it would be impossible to credit him. On the contrary, nothing could be more alien to Shakespeare's art than the obscurity surrounding the fate of one of the principal figures which is demanded here. This art, as we see at every step of our investigation, prescribes to itself the law of clearness and tries to observe it in every detail of the action, its motives, and its evolution. It is true, as will be shown later on, that this intention is not always carried out; but single instances of failure, like the enigmatic disappearance of the fool in *King Lear*, remain exceptions. This example, moreover, clearly indicates that the poet did not take the figure as seriously as many of his critics do. But in the case of the death of a principal person like Lady Macbeth the giving of complete information is one of the greatest necessities from the point of view of Shakespeare's popular art. Therefore, as far as the context allows any conclusions, this passage may be looked upon as being as genuine and unambiguous as any line in the whole of his plays.

In laying stress on this Shakespearean peculiarity we naturally do not wish to maintain that there are no passages in the plays containing statements which are false in point of fact; but the only proper way to judge these is from the point of view of the Shakespearean audience. An especially clear and instructive case is to be seen in the remarks made about Ophelia's death. Queen Gertrude relates that it is due to an accident, which she describes. The gravedigger, however, in the last act holds the opinion that she has committed suicide. Confounding art and reality, as is so often the way with Shakespearean criticism, a number of scholars are inclined to give greater credit to the simple workman than to the false Queen. No greater mistake could be made with regard to Shakespeare's technique. The report of the Queen is the first that brings the event

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to the spectator's knowledge. We learn the particulars of Ophelia's end from that wonderful passage :

There is a willow grows aslant a brook

That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream. . . .

There would be no purpose in this narration unless it contained the truth. On the other hand, the simple workman in Elizabethan times was a clown who, in accordance with a good old stage tradition, probably came on the stage with a dozen coats worn one over the other, which he took off one by one, to the great enjoyment of the audience, just as the clown still does in the circus. What he says about the principal action is not taken seriously by anybody.

Though not all cases are as simple as this one, yet in all of them our first duty will be to ascertain clearly the position of the speaker and the order in time of the remark, and to inquire how far the spectator must be prepared to interpret the conflicting statement in its true light.

### III

#### CHARACTER AND EXPRESSION

**H**ARMONY MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THE PLAY (SHYLOCK).—One of the things that Shakespeare has been most frequently censured for is that he fails to distinguish his characters by their style of utterance. In recent times this thesis has found its most vigorous supporter in Tolstoi. Tolstoi, who holds the astounding opinion that Shakespeare is absolutely incapable of drawing characters, considers their language especially as devoid of all individuality. "They all talk in the same manner," he says. "Lear's rage is not distinguishable from that of Edgar when he simulates madness. Kent and the fool use the same kind of language. The words of one character might equally well be put into the mouth of another, and from the quality of the language we should be quite unable to ascertain who is speaking."

Tolstoi's manner of finding fault with Shakespeare's power of individualizing is unjustified in most, though possibly not in all, respects. Obviously we must first study the dramatic practice of the time. This is largely unindividualistic, though the Renaissance critics in their theoretical writings early laid stress on the so-called requirement of decorum (*cf.* Spingarn, *Lit. Crit.*, p. 85). An English dramatist applies this demand to the drama in the epigrammatic dictum that on the stage the voice of the crow should not be the same as that of the nightingale (*cf.* D. Klein, *Literary Criticism from the Elizabethan Dramatists*, New York, 1910, p. 30 *seq.*); Ben Jonson especially did his best to observe this precept, but in reality it was so little carried into practice that Shakespeare did not find it fully established as a dramatic tradition. The

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

lack of realism which we have observed in various other details of dramatic construction is noticeable here also. Our results show that Shakespeare's technique is not so realistic as has always been assumed; similarly, we do not find in the plays a consistent and careful endeavour to observe a strict harmony in the relation of character and language. It is true, however, that in a number of cases this kind of harmony is one of the strong points of Shakespearean art. A splendid example of it which Tolstoi altogether overlooked is the picture of Shylock. Whatever Shylock says bears the stamp of his character.

*Note.* The consummate skill shown in this figure has made it almost a dogma among Shakespearean critics that Shakespeare must have drawn it from life. The older critics held that he had acquired this knowledge of the Jewish character on a journey to Italy; later researches proved that in spite of the prohibition, which was in force until Cromwell abolished it, some Jews had managed to exist in London, and these Shakespeare was said to have studied. Closer observation, however, shows that this preconceived opinion has not much to recommend it either. The peculiar Jewish qualities of Shylock are mostly seen in a keen intellect, a well-controlled though passionate temperament, which never dims his clear judgment even in the moments of extreme inward excitement, a strict adherence to the letter of the law, due to incessant study of the Talmud, an inability to sympathize with exuberant mirth, an insatiable avarice, and an uprightness governed by purely external standards. All these are obviously qualities which can be more or less traced back to the foundation of a gloomy, secretive, and fanatical character and its relation to the fixed course of the action. Shylock is a merciless usurer, a type which appears in all races and at all times. For his external embodiment, however, Shakespeare did not require to seek in real life; he found it, or a great many details of it, elaborately depicted in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, from which he drew other traits as well. The same applies to the peculiarities of his

88

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

language—for instance, the numerous Biblical phrases. The Jew of Malta despises

these swine-eating Christians,  
Unchosen nation, never circumcis'd,

exactly as does Shylock, who sneers at the Christians who eat pork, "The habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into." He speaks of his tribe as "the seed of Abraham," while Shylock exclaims, "O father Abram"; he calls his enemies "this offspring of Cain," as Shylock calls his "fools of Hagar's offspring." Old Testament reminiscences are plentiful. He speaks of "old Abraham's happiness," of the Egyptian plagues, of the journey through the desert, of the tribe of Levi, and, like Shylock, mentions the synagogue. The similarity of his mental processes to those of Shylock is most clearly seen when, deprived of his fortune and reminded by the other Jews to think of Job, he reveals his knowledge of the Scriptures in replying:

What tell you me of Job? I wot his wealth  
Was written thus; he had seven thousand sheep,  
Three thousand camels, and two hundred yoke  
Of labouring oxen and five hundred  
She-asses: but for every one of those  
Had they been valu'd at indifferent rate,  
I had at home, and in mine argosy,  
And other ships that came from Egypt last,  
As much as would have bought his beasts and him,  
And yet have kept enough to live upon.

This profusion of details from Old Testament stories bears the closest resemblance to Shylock's elaborate reference to Jacob's contract with Laban about the "parti-coloured lambs" (I, iii). Shakespeare here unquestionably imitates Marlowe's endeavour to represent the Jew as living entirely in the ideas of the Old Testament. But Wolff certainly goes too far when he maintains that the frequent employment of the rhetorical question is a specifically Jewish trait; Brandes says more explicitly that



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

"his thinking constantly oscillates between question and answer, a less important but characteristic trait which we can still find to-day in the description of primitive Jews." Here he has passages in mind like

What should I say to you ? Should I not say,  
Hath a dog money ?

Or,

Hath not a Jew eyes ? hath not a Jew hands ? . . . If  
you prick us, do we not bleed ? if you tickle us, do we not  
laugh ? if you poison us, do we not die ?

But in this way a meaning is read into these passages which they do not possess. In the first place, the rhetorical question is the most natural form of expressing passionate resentment and indignation, and therefore may be expected to occur whenever moods of this nature find an outlet in language. As a matter of fact, we frequently encounter this form where such feelings are expressed, for example, at the beginning of *Julius Caesar*, when Marullus, one of the tribunes, furiously asks the holiday-makers:

Wherefore rejoice ? What conquest brings he home ?  
What tributaries follow him to Rome  
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels ? . .  
And do you now put on your best attire ?  
And do you now cull out a holiday ? . .

I, i

There are many more occasions when Shakespeare uses the rhetorical question for presenting general problems. We need think only of Falstaff's famous soliloquy (1 *Henry IV*, V, i):

Can honour set-to a leg ? No ! Or an arm ? No ! Or  
take away the grief of a wound ? No ! Honour hath no  
skill in surgery then ? No ! . . .

As contrasted with this figure of speech, the stereotyped Jewish mode of expression is the answering of a question by means of a counter-question, which resumes the

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

sentence in an almost unaltered form. Of this peculiarity scarcely a trace is found in Shylock's language. Equally untenable is the view that the habit of repeating what has been said is a Jewish trait. An instance of this would be the introductory part of the scene in which Shylock first appears :

*Shy.* Three thousand ducats,—well.

*Bass.* Ay, sir, for three months.     •

*Shy.* For three months,—well.

*Bass.* For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.

*Shy.* Antonio shall be bound,—well.

I, iii

Although our actors have become accustomed to employing a Jewish twang here which still further individualizes the figure, this is not justified by the text. Shylock is reticent, suspicious, morose, shut up within himself ; this is the very moment for him to put on an impenetrable mask. The first idea of revenge is just dawning on his mental horizon. For this reason he is so slow, so intolerably slow, in answering Bassanio's questions. He acts as though he were being spoken to in a foreign language, so that the young man, losing control of himself, overwhelms him with the impatient questions : " May you stead me ? Will you pleasure me ? Shall I know your answer ? " The Jew, however, still remains unmoved, muttering : " Three thousand ducats, for three months, and Antonio bound." Here, as elsewhere in the play, his language is not a racial peculiarity, but rather the most subtle means of depicting a sneaking, underhand character. This repetition of words, which later on frequently occurs, especially in the scene with Tubal—

What, what, what ? ill luck, ill luck ? . . . I thank God,  
I thank God :—Is it true, is it true ? . . . Good news, good  
news : ha ! ha ! . . .

III, i

Shakespeare uses for various purposes, mostly to characterize old people, including such as are not Jews ; hence it cannot be regarded as a Jewish trait. Thus very little remains

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of Shakespeare's supposed studies from Jewish models. Indeed, we may be sure that the witnessing of a good representation of *The Jew of Malta* had made him independent of all the models in the world. Marlowe's play was all the more useful as its hero already possessed, to a very noticeable degree, that quality of Shylock which most critics agree in overlooking, viz., his servile and repulsive politeness, which so surprisingly appears in the scene with Antonio (I, iii). We find the Jew of Malta commenting upon this trait with that self-characterization which is quite usual in Marlowe's works as well as Shakespeare's: "We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please" (Act II). Even the manner of intercourse which the Jew observed upon the stage when speaking to the Christians may be learnt from *The Jew of Malta*. There Barabas turns away from Ludowick, the Christian, and replies to his astonished inquiry for the reason of this behaviour:

That when we speak with Gentiles like to you,  
We turn into the air to purge ourselves.

Under these circumstances, as Shakespeare was so well provided with a fully elaborated dramatic model of a Jewish type, it is quite unnecessary to assume that he studied living persons. Here, as elsewhere, Shakespeare incorporates in his work artistic forms created by other hands. He endows the gloomy usurer with the qualities of Marlowe's Jewish type. This is the origin of Shylock, so we need no longer trouble to find a definite model in Rodrigo Lopez, the Court physician of Elizabeth—a most unfortunate but apparently irrepressible fancy among Shakespearean scholars.<sup>1</sup> The whole problem, by the way, is rendered unnecessarily difficult by people who regard the creative processes of the poetic mind as largely analogous to the workings of their own imagination. We know that, for instance, the Austrian dramatist Anzengruber, whose fame as a playwright rested on his excellent representation of the Tirolese peasantry, used to smile at his admirers who constantly wanted to be told that he had made a thorough study of them, and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Dempewolf, *Shakespeares angebliche Modelle*, Jena, 1915.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

that he was never tired of assuring them how superficial his knowledge of these people really was. "Experience," said Goethe of himself, "in my case has never been anything but confirmation."

2. LACK OF HARMONY.—The figure of Shylock is not the only one which Shakespeare attempts to characterize by a careful attention to harmony of language and character. We notice a similar procedure elsewhere, *e.g.*, in the figure of Hotspur in *Henry IV*, whose fiery temper is likewise expressed in his manner of speaking. His words come from his mouth "all in a lump," as Vischer says; it would be better to say they stumble over one another. His wife refers to his "speaking thick," a peculiarity which his admirers imitate. Schlegel has wrongly interpreted this as meaning "stuttering," whereas only a spluttering and indistinct manner of speech is meant, due to excessive haste and impatience. Here we have the best proof imaginable that Shakespeare's language is destined above all for spoken delivery. It is the inability of Percy in his excitement to recall a name which causes him again and again to break up the construction of the sentence :

In Richard's time,—What do you call the place ?  
A plague upon 't !—it is in Gloucestershire ;  
'T was where the mad-cap duke his uncle kept ;  
His uncle York.

1 *Henry IV*, I, iii

It is true that here the manner of speaking fully and adequately expresses the feeling. But in other passages occasionally doubts may arise whether the style, in a wider sense, correctly mirrors this character. One gets the impression that Shakespeare is making full use of the licence which later on Chesterfield accorded to the poet, *viz.*, to make his figures talk with more *esprit* than people do in reality, his justification being that on the stage our imagination is asked to make so many concessions with regard to place, time, and action that it can easily make a few more.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Not always does he endeavour to produce such a complete harmony of character and language as in the case of Shylock. Though Sir Walter Raleigh says in his book on Shakespeare (p. 224) that, as a rule, he is most particular in adapting his images to the individuality of the person using them, yet Lady Capulet, for example, hardly makes such a learned impression that we should credit her with an intimate knowledge of marginal glosses :

Examine every married lineament  
And see how one another lends content ;  
And what obscured in this fair volume lies,  
Find written in the margin of his eyes.

I, iii, 85

Or take the aged Friar Laurence in the same play, who probably had too little of the spirit of light-hearted youth left in him to inform the exiled Romeo of his punishment in the words

Affliction is enamour'd of thy parts.

III, iii, 2

Instances of this practice might be multiplied. They cannot blind us to the fact that Shakespeare in many cases really characterizes the individuality and the mood of the speaker by stylistic means in the minutest details—a case in point is the language of Lear—but that in many others there is little justification for the endeavour to explain every expression by reference to the character of the figure using it.

A very comical exaggeration of this idea is, for instance, the view which traces the pleasure Othello takes in highly figurative language to "the pure type of the tropical negro race with its primitive, childish emotions." If wealth of imagery in the speeches of Shakespeare's personages were really a sign of negro blood we should have to wonder at the white complexion of most of his figures. For the explanation of other peculiar uses of imagery other far-fetched reasons are adduced. Macbeth, for example, when asked by the suspicious courtiers why he

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

had so quickly killed the chamberlains of King Duncan, whom he accuses of having murdered the old man, replies that this was done in the first flush of indignation, and justifies his action by the following description:

Here lay Duncan  
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood ;  
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature  
For ruin's wasteful entrance : there, the murderers,  
Steeped in the colours of their trade.

II, iii, 114

Of these metaphors many critics, following Dr Johnson's interpretation (*cf.* Cuninghame's *Macbeth* in the "Arden" edition, 1912), say that they are so forced and unnatural because they are intended as a mark of artifice and dissimulation, to show the difference between the studied language of hypocrisy and the natural outcries of sudden passion. The whole speech, so considered, says Dr Johnson very characteristically, "is a remarkable instance of judgment, as it consists entirely of antithesis and metaphor."

But if we were to look for hypocrisy behind every speech of this kind in Shakespeare's dramas we should find very few honest people left in them. We should not know, *e.g.*, what to think of the honest Macduff, who in the same play, immediately before Macbeth's speech, when bringing the first news of the assassination of the King, uses the strange image :

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence  
The life o' the building !

Equally beside the mark is the opinion expressed by a theatrical expert like Granville Barker (*The Winter's Tale*, an Acting Edition with a Preface, London, 1912, p. ix) about the detailed characterization which Shakespeare has given to the figure of Leontes. He considers it as a bold technical trick deliberately to repeat an obscurity of expression two or three times—for the spectator would certainly

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

not be able to understand the passages on first hearing them—in order to express the excitedness of his spirit.

But there are a large number of passages in Shakespeare containing conglomerations of ideas which are very difficult to disentangle, and which do not serve the purpose of expressing emotional tumult.

Fr. Th. Vischer, again (iii, p. 94), reads a psychological subtlety into the text which is quite out of the question when he explains Iago's words to Roderigo (*Othello*, I, i), "I am not what I am" (instead of "what I seem"), as meaning that "Shakespeare here purposely uses the paradoxical form, because he wishes to impress a shallow mind." Applying this mode of reasoning to Macbeth (I, iii, 141) where he says of himself that he is dreadfully shaken by his own murderous fancies, "and nothing is, but what is not," we ought to conclude that he also merely wishes to make an impression upon himself and so on.

3. DETACHED SCENES AND INSERTED EPISODES (BOTTOM, MERCUTIO, POLONIUS).—Here we have to deal with a phenomenon which frequently appears in the construction of whole scenes. The author's interest takes quite a different direction, and the character loses its unity for a scene or a part of a scene, though generally not to the point of seriously endangering the impression of the whole. A good instance is afforded by a scene (III, i) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There we see the mechanics preparing their play of Pyramus and Thisbe in the wood. The fairies intervene; quaking with fear, the mechanics scatter in all directions, and only the busiest of them all, Bottom, who is so delightful in his stupidity, remains with the ass's head suddenly fixed on to his shoulders by Oberon's magic. In spite of this Titania, upon awaking, is forced by the magic spell to fall in love with him, and makes her fairies do homage to him. But a remarkable change has taken place in him. Whereas the ass's head is clearly meant to symbolize the nature of his mind, his language, which so far has only been funny, now becomes almost witty, and he replies to the fairies telling him their names

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

in the most humorous manner; e.g., when he hears the name of Mustard-seed, he says:

Good master Mustard-seed, I know your patience well:  
that same cowardly, giant-like ox-beef hath devoured many  
a gentleman of your house: I promise you, your kindred  
hath made my eyes water ere now.

Here Shakespeare was thinking of a very similar, but less witty, passage in a work of his predecessor, John Lilly, and when imitating the model his mind, ever active in elaborating new ideas, carried him beyond the limits of the character he had drawn; for obviously the humour of the passage consists in the fact that Titania loves an ass, and there would be no humour if the ass were to become witty through her love.

This inconsistency, however, is hardly noticed, because the whole fantastic and dream-like action takes place in Fairy-land. More apparent is the clash of character and language in the case of Mercutio's speech about Queen Mab:

She is the fairies' midwife; and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the forefinger of an alderman,  
Drawn with a team of little atomies  
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep:  
Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs;  
The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers;  
The traces, of the smallest spider's web;  
The collars, of the moonshine's wat'ry beams:  
Her whip, of cricket's bone; the lash, of film:  
Her waggoner, a small grey-coated gnat,  
Not half so big as a round little worm  
Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;  
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,  
Made by the joiner squirrel, or old grub,  
Time out of mind the fairies' coach-makers.  
And in this state she gallops night by night  
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love:  
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight:  
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees:  
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream. . . .

*Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Does this kind of language harmonize with Mercutio's character? He is conceived as a contrast to the soft, sentimental Romeo, infinitely more matter-of-fact than he, experienced and averse to all sentiment and reverie, despising all tenderness and gentle feeling. Full of vigour and animal spirits, he is always spoiling for a fight, enjoys stirring up disputes everywhere, teasing and deriding people, picking quarrels in order to come to blows. His straightforwardness and honesty are expressed in a natural bluntness, which in his well-meant jokes takes the form of indelicate and obscene language (in Schlegel's translation these things are greatly toned down). He is constantly telling smutty stories. With all these faults he is a manly and dauntless character who betrays no weakness even in the face of the death which he knows his own love of fighting has brought upon him. But we cannot possibly believe that this character, whom Kreyssig rightly calls "the coarsest fellow of the whole company," should have so fine an understanding of the wonderful grace and delicacy of the Fairy Queen as is shown in this celebrated description. It is hard to imagine that he should have been able thus lovingly to contemplate and enter into the magical microcosm of animate nature. On the few other occasions when this silvery note is struck, the imaginative words are put, in one instance, into the mouth of the Fairy Queen herself:

The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,  
And, for night tapers, crop their waxen thighs,  
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,  
To have my love to bed, and to arise ;  
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,  
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.

*Midsummer Night's Dream, III, i*

In another case we hear words which are not dissimilar from the lips of Ariel :

Where the bee sucks, there suck I :  
In a cowslip's bell I lie ;  
There I couch when owls do cry  
On the bat's back I do fly  
After summer merrily.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,  
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

*The Tempest, V, i*

This kind of harmony, appropriate enough in this passage, is out of place in the speech from *Romeo and Juliet*. From the lips of a Fairy Queen or an Ariel such delicate and dream-like music of language sounds natural, but we refuse to accept it as genuine from the mouth of a bully like Mercutio. In the latter case the wonderful passage resembles an operatic air, inserted for the sake of the music without regard to the characterization. No one will be surprised at this interruption of the dramatic unity who has paid attention to the frequent occurrence of similar transgressions of dramatic laws. There is no essential difference between this insertion and the reference made in *Hamlet* to the children's companies which force the actors of the capital to take to the highroad and lead a vagrant existence in the provinces.

In this connexion we may take another figure which lacks unity, and try to understand the nature of the jarring element in it. The purpose of Polonius in *Hamlet*, quite apart from his share in the action, is principally to create an atmosphere of the Court. If we imagine this figure to be removed, the whole aspect of the Danish Court is changed. He is the Lord Chamberlain who by constantly taking up a respectful attitude toward the members of the royal house gives them their proper background, and by his fawning on them even in familiar conversations sets off and draws attention to their dignity. This obsequiousness and devotion to the Court are perfectly genuine in him. His part in the play is principally to represent a true servant of the Crown. The best proof that this is Shakespeare's own intention is again furnished by Polonius' self-characterization; he says of himself:

I hold my duty as I hold my soul  
Both to my God and to my gracious king.

*II, ii*

This impression is confirmed by the reflection of his

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

character in the minds of the King and Queen. The King calls him "a man faithful and honourable," the Queen speaks of him as a good old man. The information that the people are excited "for good Polonius' death" (IV, v) is unmistakable in its significance. These opinions, according to Shakespeare's dramatic technique, are to be taken quite seriously.

We may therefore agree with Löning in his attempt to vindicate the character of Polonius so far as to admit that those critics who make of him an altogether contemptible figure without high moral principles misunderstand the action or judge him from an anachronistic point of view. He is ignorant of the murder and considers the King as a man of honour; he fulfils his duty in reporting the discovery he believes he has made regarding the cause of the Prince's madness. His eavesdropping, first in company with the King and then alone behind the arras in the Queen's room, was not meant by Shakespeare to be anything really immoral, as Löning has aptly shown (p. 306 *seq.*). Hamlet himself, who detests him with all his heart, does not cast any direct slur upon his moral character.

All the more does he get on the Prince's nerves by his other qualities. It is very significant that these are found already in the *Urhamlet*, some of them even in Saxo Grammaticus. The latter says that the friend of the King who gave him the advice to spy on Hamlet possessed a greater abundance of imagination than of wisdom (*præsumptione quam solertia abundantior*), and at once proceeds to explain in what sense this remark is to be understood by making that person say "that he had with greater sagacity discovered a much superior means which was well suited for practical application and extremely useful." These suggestions had led the author of the *Urhamlet*, a work of which apparently we have a dim and imperfect reflection in the German play of *Fratricide Punished*,<sup>1</sup> to create his Corambus. This figure, whose name is not changed to Polonius until we come to Shakespeare's Second Quarto, was intended to produce a ludi-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gertrud Landsberg, *Ophelia*, p. 46 *seq.*

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

crous effect by the contrast between his empty-headedness and his great opinion of himself, though at the same time he was represented as a true and faithful servant and confidant of the King. In Shakespeare's revision of the play these fundamental qualities of the character have remained entirely unchanged. We may safely assume that *Fratricide Punished*, which is in all respects a very inferior rendering of the story, simplifies and obliterates a good many traits of this character also; but it is significant that here Corambus-Polonius at his very first appearance is given a touch of the clown by his stilted and consequential phrases, which in *Hamlet* do not appear until much later. In the former play the King asks: "Has it [the departure of Laertes] been made with your consent?" He replies:

Yes, with consent superior, consent medium and consent inferior. Oh, your Majesty! he has received from me a surpassingly fine, excellent, and splendid consent.

In the second scene after this he continues in the same vein:

Great news, my gracious lord and king!

*King.* What news is there? Come, tell me!

*Corambus.* Prince Hamlet is mad, aye, as mad as the Greek Madman ever was!

*King.* And what has made him mad?

*Corambus.* The fact that he has lost his reason.

*King.* Where did he lose his reason?

*Corambus.* That I know not; you must ask the man who has found it.

Ophelia, who comes on the stage fleeing from Hamlet, brings the apparent explanation of his madness, and Corambus dispels the doubts of the King, who is endowed with greater intelligence, with the over-wise reflection that

Love is strong enough to make a man mad. For I still remember, when I was young, how Love used to plague me, aye, it made me as mad as a march-hare; now, however, I no longer pay attention to it: I prefer sitting by the fire and counting my red pennies and drinking your Majesty's health.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

In the first draft of this character there was much to stimulate Shakespeare's artistic imagination and give him an opportunity for creating new forms. He had a keen eye for the comic aspects of self-complacent stupidity, as is shown by his Justice Shallow, his Dogberry (*Much Ado about Nothing*), his Malvolio (*Twelfth Night*). Another attraction was that this figure belongs to the class of fawning courtiers, whom he frequently chastises with the lash of his irony. We now have the fundamental traits contained in that raw material which Shakespeare's unexampled art transformed into a highly individualized creation: we have the obsequious, honest, but self-complacent, pompous old shallow-pate.

Shakespeare's art here triumphantly displays its power of representing the most delicate shades of a personality. We see an old man without the proper dignity of old age, with the *loquacitas senilis*, the loquacity of people who are excessively fond of hearing themselves talk, and in doing so become so diffuse that they constantly lose the thread; a man always burning with curiosity, over-officious and over-wise, full of the mistrust of old age, vain, and convinced of his own indispensability and infallibility; a man who has never seen more than the surface of things, but who believes that he has passed through the deepest experiences of life, a dabbler in science of the kind that confounds copiousness with thoroughness, and whose smug self-complacency loves to express itself in the most insipid witticisms. There is nothing behind all this but an empty head. For the purpose of fully characterizing him Shakespeare has added a whole scene, viz., that in which he orders his servant to make underhand inquiries about his son's life in Paris; a scene which is absolutely superfluous from a dramatic point of view. None of the critics who commit the anachronism of denouncing this action because it offends our modern sense of decency appear to have ever read the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son, in which the father, while taking the greatest interest in the young man's well-being, yet frequently informs him that he has people watching him and reporting every one of

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

his actions while he is abroad. So Lönning is undoubtedly right in saying that this scene, far from making Polonius contemptible, serves "to represent him in a somewhat drastic manner as a *sly old fellow* who has a predilection for roundabout ways." It is on this fundamental trait, taken from the *Urhamlet*, that emphasis is laid. But Polonius remains completely within the mental sphere suggested by the silly remarks quoted above, which he makes in *Fratri-cide Punished*, when he offers the intently listening royal couple his opinion of Hamlet, hopelessly entangled in an interminable train of infinitely tedious reflections:

My liege, and madam, to expostulate  
What majesty should be, what duty is,  
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,  
Were nothing but to waste night, day and time.  
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,  
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,  
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad :  
Mad call I it ; for, to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad ?

II, ii

These are the words of a fool, and effusions like this can make us understand why Hamlet, whose mental condition presents people and things to him with an almost exaggerated clearness, does not hesitate to call him a fool and refuses to take him seriously. He describes him as a great baby, who is not yet out of swaddling clothes, *i.e.*, he considers him as being in his second childhood ; he recommends Ophelia to take care that he plays the fool only at home, requests the actors not to make fun of him, and at last, when he slays him with his own hand, has no further word of pity for the "wretched, rash, intruding fool." All this, taken in connexion with the origin of the character, shows quite clearly how it is to be understood.

The conception of Polonius we have thus formed cannot be altered by the fact that among the great bulk of his silly twaddle there are occasionally to be found some flashes of reason. Shakespeare, as we have seen, is far too intelligent

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to be swayed by the illusion that he is dealing with an essentially foolish character, and that therefore he has to limit himself to putting only foolish words into the mouth of that figure. Already the reflection about brevity being the soul of wit is a little out of keeping with the rest of the speech ; further, the remark that age is gifted with an excess of mistrust, whereas youth has too little of it, is too good for Polonius ; and, similarly, the ingenious paradox of "sugaring the devil" has the true Shakespearean ring. These details, however, are not of much importance compared with the parting scene between Polonius and his son (I, iii). Laertes has just said good-bye to Ophelia, his sister, when Polonius enters. The son salutes him with the words which breathe true reverence and filial spirit :

A double blessing is a double grace ;  
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

Whereupon Polonius :

Yet here, Laertes ! Aboard, aboard, for shame !  
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,  
And you are stay'd for. There ; my blessing with  
thee !  
And these few precepts in thy memory  
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.  
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar ;  
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel ; but, being in,  
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.  
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice ;  
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.  
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not express'd in fancy ; rich, not gaudy ;  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man ;  
And they in France of the best rank and station  
Are most select and generous, chief in that.  
Neither a borrower nor a lender be ;

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This above all : to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
Farewell : my blessing season this in thee !  
*Laertes.* Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

It is very instructive now to see how the critics who consider the correspondence of character and language as a self-evident principle have got out of the difficulty presented by this wonderful speech. Not all of them make so light of the matter as does H. Conrad (*Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 1911, Introd., p. 25), who contemptuously observes : "He bestows upon his son another blessing, let us hope with a new selection of those trivial 'wise saws' of everyday life which he has heard or read, transcribed, learned by heart and now has in stock. The poet thus characterizes him from the very beginning as an idle talker, not to be taken seriously by the spectator. He has not acquired sufficient educational experience to perceive that no effect is produced by exemplary rules of conduct, especially if a whole lot of them be given at a time, but only by the personal example of the teacher, which is ineradicably imprinted upon the soul of the growing individual. This stupid and narrow-minded old man, as we shall see, always chooses the wrong means." According to this critic a teacher ought not to give his pupils any prescriptions at all, but we feel that the view taken of these words has been coloured and distorted by a conception of Polonius' character gained from other passages, and that the critic would probably praise them with equal fervour as the finest pearls of practical wisdom if they were spoken by another personage.

Conrad's opinion that the words of Polonius have been taken from a book and learned by heart is not original ; he has taken it over from a number of previous critics (Löning, p. 302). One of them has gone so far in a stage edition (Reclam, No. 2444) as to demand that Polonius in this place should take a book out of his pocket and read



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

out the rules. This idea, which apparently derives from the great actor Edward Devrient, is not justified in any way, and, besides, is only a very poor makeshift, because the saying of Henry Thomas Buckle would still be applicable here, that ideas are the property of him who knows how to entertain them. The attempt to defeat this last argument by asserting that the words ought to be recited mechanically without any inward conviction would mean dragging in an absolutely arbitrary conception. Other critics try to get round the difficulty. Wolff points out that the words are contained already in *Euphues*, that "this, however, is of no importance" (?) since they sound well; that Polonius in reality is not the fool Hamlet takes him for; this critic obviously, though with some hesitation, regards the words as harmonizing with the character of Polonius. Fr. Th. Vischer is clearly not quite sure from which side he is to attack the problem, but finds a number of things to censure in the speech. He thinks that "a good father, possessing a true mental and moral culture, would have spoken a little more of moral duties, to the effect: strive and work to become a truly noble character"; also "he ought to recommend the boy who is going to the university to be a good and diligent student." On reading these remarks we regret that Polonius had not been able to enjoy the ennobling influence of Fr. Th. Vischer's acquaintance. A champion of Polonius appears in Löning, who tries his best to accentuate the proper value of his words and, rightly attaching little importance to the fact that some of them are found in *Euphues*,<sup>1</sup> regards them as genuine expressions of Polonius' inmost convictions.

<sup>1</sup> If we regard the precepts given to a son not from the standpoint of a professor of Tübingen University living in the nineteenth century, but with the eyes of the Elizabethan, we shall find that they contain many of the best educational principles to which that time gave birth, presented in the most excellent form. Naturally Shakespeare's ideas are not quite original in this as in most other cases; hence several of the rules have been found in contemporary literature, though not so well expressed. Cf. Löning, *loc. cit.*, and Fr. Brie, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 42, p. 209 seq. In Shakespeare himself, however, similar ideas are found in various places, a fact which Löning was one of the first to notice; e.g., in the speech of the Countess of Rousillon to her son at his departure (*All's Well that Ends Well*, I, i). Some of the remarks made about Troilus (*cf. above*, p. 58) strike the same note.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

If we inquire, however, how he brings them into harmony with the character of Polonius, whom Hamlet rightly asserts to have "a plentiful lack of wit," we find that he can achieve this only by doing violence to the meaning of the scene in a most curious manner. Though the whole of it is obviously quite serious, he tries to read a comical element into it. This he does in the following way: Laertes is in the greatest hurry to depart. His father keeps him back in order to bestow upon him a whole bagful of good precepts, the communication of which evidently gives him great pleasure, so that he grows more and more diffuse, though at first he had spoken of them as only a "few precepts," and though the son is pressed for time. "*In this contrast,*" he says, "*between the pressing situation and the leisurely and self-complacent manner in which Polonius spins out his 'few precepts,' and even repeats some of them (?), lies the characteristic and, at the same time, comic feature of this speech,* not, as has been supposed, in its contents or mode of delivery." Not a word of all this is said in the play. On the contrary, we there see the son welcoming the opportunity of once more taking leave of his father, and expressly stating that

A double blessing is a double grace ;  
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

But an adroit twist given to the meaning makes these words signify the contrary of what they really say. Löning will have them bear an ironical meaning, and be delivered with a smile upon the speaker's face. "Laertes must give us to understand by his facial expression and gestures that he knows all this already; gradually he must grow a little impatient." Here we must indeed agree with what Rümelin says (p. 38): "German Shakespearean criticism seems flatly to contradict the maxim of the theatrical manager in the prologue to *Faust* :

Gebt Ihr ein Stück, so gebt es gleich in Stücken.  
Was hilft's, wenn Ihr ein Ganzes dargebracht,  
Das Publikum wird es euch doch zerpfücken.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

The idea of the Shakespearean critics seems to be : What does it matter if your play consists only of fragments ? The German professors will make a whole of them and bring out a central idea."

By such arbitrary procedure it is possible, of course, to find reasons for any kind of explanation we choose. But even if Löning's view were less dogmatic it would have to be rejected because of the inconsistencies it contains. In vain do we look in Polonius' speech for that leisurely and self-complacent manner which, as he maintains, increases with every word. Leaving out of consideration for the moment the beauty of the thoughts, and paying attention only to the form, we must say that it is not at all like Polonius' usual style either ; it is clear, precise, exact, and strongly marked, one idea following close upon the other, and the speaker never once permits his halting wit to divert the current of the thought.

The most interesting aspect of this attempt to solve the problem is the way in which even Löning, otherwise a most scientific interpreter, neglects the fact that the text does not offer him any evidence for his theory, and by means of a most questionable exegetical trick, viz., by declaring it to be ironical, completely reverses the meaning of the passage. If we no longer adhere to the natural sense and clear verbal content of a passage no understanding is possible. By this method we easily arrive at surprising discoveries in Shakespeare's text of that kind which actors delight in making. The classical example of these is the trick of the famous Sonnenthal, who in Hamlet's monologue began the passage

But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourne . . .

as a simple declarative sentence, and then put a question-mark after the words "no traveller returns." This was done because the Prince was supposed, at the moment of speaking these words, to remember the ghost of his father, who actually has "returned." It is to be wished that such actors may one day make the discovery

108

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

that in all probability Shakespeare was including them also when he made Hamlet say : " And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them."

The inevitable conclusion to which we come again is that Shakespeare breaks the unity of the character in the parting scene, and puts words and ideas into Polonius' mouth which proceed immediately from the poet's own personality and cannot be brought into connexion with the character and behaviour of the speaker. From this point of view I cannot help attaching much greater importance than Löning does to the fact that in the First Quarto this and other passages of a sententious character are enclosed in quotation-marks, which has been shown by Dyce to be a not unusual way of treating "gnomic portions" in early printed books. Obviously this serves to modify the personal and spontaneous character of the words. So Shakespeare, after his fashion, satisfied the demand of the time that a tragedy should be sententious.

Just one more characteristic passage may be adduced in this connexion to show how the harmony of character and language in the Shakespearean drama may be destroyed. It occurs in the first part of *Henry VI* (III, iii). Joan of Arc takes upon herself to turn the Duke of Burgundy from his alliance with the English. Her eloquence succeeds in achieving what the French King had not dared to hope for : the Duke's patriotic feeling is roused again, he breaks off all connexion with the British and goes over with flying colours to the French. Then La Pucelle surprises us by the curious 'aside' : " Done like a Frenchman : turn and turn again." She is obviously referring to the reputation of the French for fickleness. Now this English criticism of the French national character is clearly quite impossible in the mouth of the French heroine, and from the very beginning of Shakespearean criticism English students have been puzzled and driven to despair by this line. It was reserved for Mr H. C. Hart, editor of the play in the " Arden " edition and otherwise a most distinguished scholar, to remove this difficulty by the discovery that the remark was not so strange after all, because Joan of Arc

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

came from Lorraine. By this detection of geographical and historical learning no one would probably have been more amazed than the author or the authors of this play, of which, we may safely say, the greater part is wrongly ascribed to Shakespeare. The true explanation is infinitely more simple : acting out of character was perfectly familiar to the dramatic art of that time. Thus Gremio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, though the whole play is laid in Italy, says (II, i) in similar fashion :

Set foot under thy table : tut, a toy !  
*An old Italian fox* is not so kind, my boy.

And in *The Jew of Malta* Barabas, the Jew, incites Abigail, his daughter :

Daughter, a word more : kiss him, speak him fair,  
And *like a cunning Jew* so cast about  
That ye be both made sure ere you come out.

*Act II*

In all these cases the poet quite naïvely exchanges the point of view of the speaker for that of the audience.

Naturally the result of this inquiry leads us to a conclusion similar to that which we obtained above (*cf.* p. 53 *seq.*) from studying the conventional treatment frequently given to the reflection of character in the minds of other persons : *the single passage no longer has an absolute, but only a relative value for the characterization of any particular person, i.e.,* in every case it will be necessary to study the context and to examine whether the passage harmonizes with the general impression or whether there are reasons for isolating it and giving it separate consideration.

## IV

### CHARACTER AND ACTION

**I**NDEPENDENCE OF THE SCENES.—The cases dealt with in the preceding chapter, in which the unity of character is disturbed for a part of the scene, prepare the way for the question to what extent Shakespeare preserves the harmony of character and action. We shall not, however, be able to get to the bottom of this problem unless we clearly recognize that in the peculiar creative processes of Shakespeare's art various elements are contained which offer a more or less energetic resistance to the establishment of perfect harmony. One of the most effective of these is the tendency to split up the action into a number of independent scenes. In dealing with it we must never lose sight of the fact that the Shakespearean drama still bears distinct traces of its medieval origin; it had grown out of a view of art in which the sense of form, in architecture as well as in epic art, favoured a juxtaposition of identical or similar elements, whereas the following period, under the influence of classical antiquity, demanded the subordination of the parts to a comprehensive idea. The definition of beauty as the "relation of the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts" is as inapplicable to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as to the mystery plays, in the primitive art-form of which many essential details of the later drama, especially the historical drama, originated. This kind of literature is sufficiently loose in structure to admit the insertion of much inartistic matter consisting largely of anachronisms and topical allusions. One instance of this practice has already been mentioned, viz., Hamlet's reference to the distress and worries of the London actors; another is the scene in *Macbeth* (IV, iii), thrust into the play

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

apparently without any artistic scruples, which tells us of King Edward the Confessor's supernatural power of healing "the King's evil" by the mere application of his hand. The obvious reason for this was that the reigning sovereign, King James I, the most notable spectator of the play, also claimed to include this power among his many special gifts, and frequently exercised it in a manner which was probably not quite in accordance with medical science. Still more noticeable is the interruption of the action by comic scenes (*cf.* p. 24 *seq.*), which occur even in places where there is apparently no intention to produce a higher unity through contrast. In these we clearly see to what extent the Shakespearean drama can occasionally dispense with internal coherence. But we must not suppose that we are dealing here with exceptional cases. In reality this practice is nothing but a symptom of Shakespeare's supreme interest in the single scene, which all his knowledge of dramatic art cannot induce him to subordinate to the interest of the whole to the extent that is demanded by a later period. We may even conclude that possibly Shakespeare's peculiar manner of dramatic construction was very different from what we generally imagine it to have been. Grillparzer somewhere says that Shakespeare had the habit of working, so to speak, "step by step" (*Works*, vol. 9). Rümelin, who holds the same view, is led by it to assert that Shakespeare aimed principally at theatrical effect, and that he knew perfectly "how little it depends on the systematic arrangement and harmony of the whole and how much on the attractive and thrilling nature of the single parts." "It is evident," says Rümelin, "that he worked in scenes; the single situation is expanded and gives rise to the complete picture; all the poetic possibilities contained in it are utilized and fully developed; a large number of scenes are intelligible and effective in themselves, or require only a few introductory words" (p. 34). It is true this opinion has been hotly contested (*e.g.*, by Vischer), and indeed the bulk and variety of Shakespeare's work renders it almost impossible to apply a judgment of this kind to the whole of his writings without

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

modification. But there can be no doubt, and a single look into a drama by Ibsen or Schiller conclusively proves it, that the number of scenes which are intelligible only from the context of the whole play is infinitely greater in the modern than in the Shakespearean drama. In the latter provision is made in order that he who has not seen the beginning or has lost the thread of the plot may still be able to take an interest in the further course of the play. To a certain extent this is also due to the greater simplicity of the action, and the less complicated nature of the problems and characters. Still we shall probably have to agree with Rümelin's contention that the single scene easily acquires a great deal of independence. A case in point is the famous scene where Richard woos Anne, the wife of his victim (*Richard III*, I, ii), which may be said to represent a complete play in little within the play itself. That dramas of that time might actually be nothing but *bundles of scenes* was first proved by the publication, by the Malone Society in 1911, of the manuscript containing the play of *Sir Thomas More* (one of the few extant manuscripts of dramas of that time). Here it is seen that quite a number of authors have parcelled out the work among themselves, several scenes being entrusted to collaborators who were not even clear about the general plan of the play, so that they did not know the most important proper names occurring in it, and instead of them sometimes wrote on the margin "Another" (xii seq.). Evidently the important thing was the scene. The effect of the play was the combined effect of the single scenes.

2. TENDENCY TO EPISODIC INTENSIFICATION.—This play of *Sir Thomas More* is a drama with an exceptionally loose construction, and cannot be accepted as direct evidence of Shakespeare's methods, as it is certain that he had no share in its composition.<sup>1</sup> Still, a kind of composition like

<sup>1</sup> The attempt, recently repeated by an English scholar, to prove that part of the manuscript is in Shakespeare's handwriting was doomed to failure from the very beginning, because he cannot possibly have been concerned in the work, which is largely a crude imitation of his own plays. Cf. the author's article on the much-discussed date of the pseudo-Shakespearean play of *Sir Thomas More* ("Engl. Stud.," vol. xlv, p. 228 seq.).



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

this greatly helps us to understand the general methods of dramatic composition at that time, and to clear up many obscure points in Shakespeare's own art. Of course we must not generalize unduly. We need hardly insist on the fact that on the whole he is most successful in making his plays coherent, and that the rather independent effect of some of the scenes does not actually lead to disorder and chaotic composition. But still we cannot help observing that even his work manifests what we may call a *tendency to episodic intensification*. If this peculiarity is not properly kept in mind one is always in danger of misunderstanding and misinterpreting him. For even when he is bent upon securing the highest effect which the subject will admit, to bring it home in the most convincing manner and make it irresistibly capture and hold the spectator's imagination, he sometimes introduces or amplifies details which cause us to lose the sense of a connected whole.

This peculiarity must be carefully distinguished from the more or less frequent signs of inadvertence which have been shown up in Shakespeare's writings; e.g., when in the beginning of *The Tempest* (I, ii) mention is made of a son of the Duke of Milan who never appears in the plot. When he wishes to heighten the effect of the scene Shakespeare's method is rather to arrange the circumstances in such a manner as to produce the greatest effect for the moment. In order, for example, to illustrate the extraordinary presence of mind which Othello shows at the moment of danger an incident is described of which no mention is made elsewhere:

I have seen the cannon  
When it hath blown his ranks into the air,  
And, like the devil, from his very arm  
Puff'd his own brother.

III, iv

We are puzzled for an instant, as we are inclined to imagine the Moor, who has passed through so many unheard-of adventures and perils from his distant African home before becoming leader of the Venetian army, as a companionless and lonely man.

Similar instances occur in many other places. But

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

frequently the details thus employed as material collide much more violently with the context than the passage from *Othello*. Thus a scene in *The Tempest* (V, i) has been criticized where Prospero bids good-bye to his magic, and mentions among the supernatural achievements of his art, namely, eclipsing the midday sun, letting loose the tempest upon land and sea, conjuring up the thunderstorm, this sign of his power :

                                graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, oped and let 'em forth  
By my so potent art.

Since there were no tombs upon the lonely, uninhabited island the view has seriously been held that these words could be taken only symbolically. A number of interpreters, such as Dowden, Brandl, and Morton Luce ("Arden" Shakespeare, *Tempest*, lxxv), actually go so far as to see in this passage a reference to Shakespeare's art, because they regard Prospero as an incarnation of the poet. Luce even believes that Shakespeare is here at the same time alluding to those scenes of his plays where the processions of ghosts appear to the dreaming Richard and Richmond, and to his bringing deceased heroes to life again upon the stage. But apart from the fact that the sequence of ideas in this passage is a direct imitation of what is said by Medea in Ovid's poem, the poet here is simply anxious to give an effective impression of Prospero's art, and thinks himself entitled to make the old magician mention all his greatest powers, though we have not been shown any example of them.

A much greater conflict with the main action is shown by passages like that in *Hamlet* where Horatio, the Prince's friend, and presumably of the same age as he, assures his companions of the watch, after the ghost has appeared to them :

Such was the very armour he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated ;  
So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,  
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

In another place we are told (V, i) that this battle was fought on the same day which saw Hamlet's birth. The difficulty that arises from one who is Hamlet's equal in age relating events which took place at the time of his birth has made one critic propose the absurd explanation that Horatio was thinking only of a portrait of the King in which he wears that suit of armour. A similar difficulty occurs in the funeral speech of Mark Antony when he points to an article of Cæsar's dress in order to bring the idea of his great past vividly before the eyes of his hearers:

You all do know this mantle : I remember  
The first time ever Cæsar put it on ;  
'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,  
That day he overcame the Nervii.

III, ii

It is of no matter to Shakespeare that Antony was not present at this battle—at any rate, this fact is not referred to in any other passage of the play. A still more remarkable contradiction occurs in *Macbeth* which Goethe was one of the first to regard as due to the rhetorical necessity of increasing the momentary effect, viz., the contradiction between the words of Lady Macbeth,

I have given suck, and know  
How tender 't is to love the babe that milks me,

I, vii, 54

and the painful and bitter outcry coming from the lips of Macduff after Macbeth has robbed him of his children: "He has no children" (IV, iii, 216). Here also an excellent escape from the difficulty has been found in the assumption that Macbeth had married a widow. Unfortunately, neither the sources nor Shakespeare's drama contain any confirmation of this view. This difficulty has been much exaggerated. There need be no direct contradiction of statements here, because Lady Macbeth may easily have lost a child in early infancy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the astonishing accumulation of literature on the subject of Macbeth's fatherhood, from Steevens to Bradley, in Appendix A of the edition of *Macbeth* in the "Arden" Shakespeare, 1912.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

About this question, however, the dramatist is not likely to have troubled himself. His purpose in this passage, when Macbeth shrinks from the deed, was to make his wife fully disclose her fury-like craving for evil, and he could not make a woman appear more "unsexed" than by showing her as a mother who in imagination

Pluck'd [her] nipple from his boneless gums  
And dash'd the brains out.

In each of the two passages, by taking two different views of Lady Macbeth's character, he secures the greatest possible effect. Examples of this kind could easily be multiplied.

Thus he makes Antony, in an attack of indignation at the fate he owes to Cleopatra, address to her the furious words :

Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,  
Forborne the getting of a lawful race,  
And by a gem of women, to be abused  
By one that looks on feeders ?

III, xi

The relations between Antony and Octavia, however, as we find them depicted in previous passages, nowhere suggest that she has been treated by him as a kind of Isolt of the White Hands, as MacCallum expresses it (p. 338). Moreover, Shakespeare must have found in the original source that she had had children by him. But as he required the trait to intensify the contrast of ideas he did not shrink from this inaccuracy.

Lastly, we must mention in this connexion the famous words with which Hamlet in his monologue refers to

The undiscovered country from whose bourne  
No traveller returns.

III, i

His doubt is all the more remarkable as the heavy burden under which he is breaking down has been laid on his shoulders by precisely such a "wanderer" from that "undiscovered country." It is almost humiliating to see how so many famous critics, instead of using their common sense,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

are led astray by the most fantastical and abstruse speculations. They seem to be competing among themselves as to who can produce the most laboured and artificial explanation. Gervinus (iii, 314) thinks that Hamlet is not in the least inconsistent, because Shakespeare's ghosts are not real ghosts, but only the visibly embodied figments of a strong imagination—a most untenable and rationalistic assumption. Fr. Th. Vischer (i, 336) involves his exposition in an almost Hegelian obscurity, quite impenetrable by the ordinary reader, by assuming a forgetting which is not a forgetting. "He has," says he, "made a ghost appear to his Hamlet and forgets this in the monologue. But he forgets it, because here the important thing is the fear which Hamlet experiences in allowing his imagination to dwell on the idea of that *terra incognita*; and yet he only half forgets it, because Hamlet's fear, after all, is that of a mentally deficient person, and moreover agrees with the popular belief. The poet plainly had a purpose in what he wrote." Understand this who can!

Kuno Fischer (p. 134 *seq.*) condemns this view in his usual emphatic manner, saying that "such a forgetting would be the sign of a weakness of memory, which would indicate approaching idiocy." But Hamlet, he thinks, is perfectly right, because though spirits return, yet the dead themselves do not return—*i.e.*, the spiritual return is not to be identified with the bodily return. The only drawback to this surprisingly simple solution is the fact that Hamlet is exclusively concerned with the question whether there will be anything at all after death and what this may be, and that this question cannot be answered by the bodies, but only by the spirits of the dead. What an expense of ingenuity over such a simple matter!

In *The Merchant of Venice*—the case is similar in a certain respect—difficulties are caused by the fact that Tubal, while telling Shylock of his search for his runaway daughter, torments him with the account of her extravagance in Genoa (III, i). The other passages, however, give no indication that the frivolous young couple did not at once go from Venice to Portia's home at Belmont. Now over-

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

conscientious expositors have been led by these circumstances to the discovery that Shylock is deceived by Tubal and that therefore the Jew is abandoned even by his co-religionists (*cf.* Ch. K. Pooler, "Arden" edition). This idea, however, is certainly quite erroneous. Shakespeare would have expressed this intention by means of an aside. Moreover, Tubal's knowledge (*e.g.*, of the ring which Jessica gave for a monkey) is substantially correct.

The explanation of all these discrepancies, as has already been indicated, is that Shakespeare's art, which lived in the spoken word, paid little attention to an exact correspondence and coherence of all the details. That vast amount of subtle speculation which his critics have evolved in the attempt to bring the conflicting elements into harmony must therefore be dismissed with Horatio's words: "'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.'" Goethe, too, saw clearly this peculiarity of Shakespeare's when he said to Eckermann (April 18, 1827): "The poet [*i.e.*, Shakespeare] on every occasion makes his characters say what is effective, right, and appropriate to the situation, without troubling overmuch to reflect whether the words may not possibly come into apparent conflict with some other passage."

3. DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF THE SAME CHARACTER IN DIFFERENT SCENES (CLEOPATRA).—All these facts are intelligible without any great mental effort, and only interest us because they are symptoms of a general tendency. More important, however, is the question to what extent the want of connexion in the scenes may occasionally influence the drawing of the characters, whether Shakespeare's method of work, in spite of his unique ability consistently to work out a complex character, may not at times give rise to contradictions, so that a practised eye can discern a change of physiognomy between the appearance of a character in one scene and another. In general, of course, this question will have to be answered in the negative, because otherwise we should be denying Shakespeare's greatest merit, which undoubtedly is his power of creating consistent characters. In a number of cases, however, we

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

shall not be able altogether to neglect the possibility that there may be contradictions. Of these the most remarkable is perhaps his treatment of the figure of Cleopatra.

Shakespeare's play of *Antony and Cleopatra* is founded upon North's translation of Plutarch. Naturally this author does not regard Cleopatra in a favourable light. The idea pervading the whole of his narrative is that she was the cause of Antony's misfortune. But he has too great a knowledge of human nature, he is too conscientious an historian, to be unjust to the unique qualities of this woman, who united to all the refined sensuality of the Orient a good deal of the culture of the Western world. It is true he gives long descriptions of her gorgeous feasts and revels with her paramour, he censures her vanity, her readiness to take offence, her calculating spirit ; yet he does not fail to mention her high mental qualities. We are told that she differed from her predecessors, the dull Egyptian kings who knew no language save their own, in having a command of the tongues of the Ethiopians, Arabs, Troglodytes, Jews, Syrians, Medians, Parthians, and several other peoples, with whose delegates she used to negotiate personally, with no help from an interpreter. Of her roguish humour the historian gives an excellent example. Antony used to go fishing in the Nile, and was often vexed at not catching anything when she was looking on. He therefore hired a diver to attach a fish to his hook under the water. But Cleopatra soon discovered the trick, hired another more skilful diver, and when Antony the next time drew in his line all the spectators were delighted to see a salted fish dangling from the hook. The infinite agility of her mind is shown by her love of adventures. With Antony, who was disguised as a slave, she visited the taverns of Alexandria, dressed as a chambermaid and posing as his sweetheart, and then again, maybe the very next day, she gave audience, seated on her throne, every inch a queen, and clad in the sumptuous garments of the goddess Isis.

The secret of her power over Antony apparently lay in her ability and willingness to share in all his occupations.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

In contrast, as we may suppose, to the Roman women, she was his companion day and night and went with him to the games, the banquet, the chase, and every physical exercise. Her beauty, as Plutarch expressly remarks, was not nearly so surprising as her grace and, above all, as the indescribable charm of her manner, which won the hearts of all her acquaintances. Her whole nature was full of the utmost refinement, and hence arose the lively opposition which Antony's coarse and plebeian jokes met with on her part. As regards the question, however, whether she really loved Antony, Plutarch seems to be very sceptical, but what he tells us of the calculated devices she employed in order to retain the friend who seemed about to forsake her is not in any way different from the usual practice of women when they wish to attach to themselves the man they love. She refuses to eat and grows thin ; "when Antony came," we read, "she turned her eyes upon him with an expression of rapture. When he left her, she broke out into sobs and tears, looked utterly dejected, and frequently managed to make Antony find her in tears. When, however, he suddenly entered, she made as though she were drying her tears and turned away her face, pretending that she did not wish him to know that she had been weeping."

If we now regard the Cleopatra of Shakespeare's drama we are astonished to find how inferior she is to the original. It is true that Plutarch gives us no clearly outlined picture of her character, but she certainly is not the great courtesan whom Shakespeare shows us in the first acts of his play. The first thing we miss is her culture. We are told nothing about her ability to negotiate with foreign peoples in their own language. As a matter of fact, we never see her acting as queen at all. Nobody would suspect that this woman, as Plutarch informs us, has for years, quite unaided, ruled a great kingdom. She never gives audience, never exercises the functions of her high office. Love seems to be her only aim in life. If the object of her passion is absent we must imagine her (I, v ; II, v) reclining drowsily on her couch, yawning and wishing to sleep away the time



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

until her lover returns, and, as this is impossible, tormenting her attendants, who are infected with her voluptuousness and frivolity. Her laziness is equalled by her sensuality. That her thoughts are continually occupied with the enjoyment of love we see from the pleasure she takes in using equivocal language, giving an equivocal meaning to her words even when she speaks of Antony sitting on horseback or of a piece of news entering her ear. This side of her character is brought to our notice by the contemptuous expressions—"a gipsy's lust" and "a strumpet"—which Philo uses in the first scene of the first act. We have seen (*cf.* p. 53 *seq.*) that in the exposition Shakespeare always means the reflection of a character in the minds of subsidiary figures to be taken quite seriously. Further on in the same act (I, ii) she is described by Enobarbus, who throughout the play acts the part of chorus, as consisting "of nothing but the finest part of pure love." That here we have to understand the word "love" in a purely erotic sense is confirmed by a remark of the same observer, who ironically declares that he can explain her constant threats to kill herself only by her belief that in death she will find a new erotic enjoyment. He evidently regards her as incapable of being attracted or charmed by anything except love. This is certainly an exaggeration, tending to ridicule her weakness, yet there can be no doubt that she is meant to appear as the type of the "artist in love." This conception, as experience proves, implies a certain amount of vulgarity, which comes out in her jesting with the eunuch and in her amusement at his answers to her question, "Hast thou affections?" (I, v). Still more vulgar is her behaviour when, talking to her maids, she makes coarse jokes about having Antony on her hook, and allows her attendants to lose all sense of social distinctions. She even shares in the truly feminine interest which her maids, always craving for erotic excitement, take in the messenger ("A proper man"—"Indeed, he is so"). The very next moment, however, like a servant who has become a mistress, she turns against those with whom she has just been so familiar, and threatens them with corporal punishment. This

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

vulgar trait, which separates irreconcilably the Cleopatra of Shakespeare from that of Plutarch, reaches its culminating point in the hysterical fits which are so excellently represented. When she hears of the marriage of Antony and Octavia she gets into such a rage that, in the manner of hysterical harlots, she loses all self-control, and mad with fury beats and stabs the messenger and would like to dash everything around her to pieces : " Melt Egypt into Nile " (II, v).

Shakespearean critics have traced this passage back to the account Plutarch gives of the interview which Cleopatra has with Octavius, and say that Shakespeare has drawn from it the trait just described. But the scene is in reality of quite a different character. Plutarch tells us : " At length she gave him [*i.e.*, the victor] an inventory of all the ready money and treasure she had. But by chance there stood by Seleucus, one of her treasurers, who to prove himself a good servant came straight to Cæsar to denounce Cleopatra for not having written down everything, but purposely keeping many things back. Cleopatra was so enraged with him that she flew upon him, took him by the hair of the head, and boxed his ears well. Cæsar burst out laughing and separated them." Then follows a declaration from Cleopatra in which she expresses her indignation at the charge, and tries to explain the facts. It is easy to see, in spite of a certain external resemblance, how little real connexion there is between the two incidents. That described by Plutarch shows the woman's ungovernable temper, which in her indignation at the mean betrayal makes her use her hands to punish the faithless servant; Shakespeare, on the other hand, shows us a mere shrew, devoid of all power of self-control, who, believing that wrong has been done to her, vents her annoyance and rage upon innocent people in order to find distraction in their sufferings.

The essential vulgarity of her character is also shown by the pride which, like every courtesan, she takes in having had so many distinguished lovers. The remembrance that among them have been the great Cæsar and the famous

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Pompey still gives her satisfaction, although now she ought to be thinking only of Mark Antony. But this thought flatters her vanity, a quality which is strongly developed in her. She exercises her trade with the clearest consciousness of her worth, knowing the high price that men are willing to pay for her. "Here are," she says proudly,

My bluest veins to kiss, a hand that kings  
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing.

But of a truly regal deportment we can find so little trace in her (though she has some touches of that dignity of which none of Shakespeare's royal personages are entirely devoid) that it sounds merely like ridiculous self-conceit when, wishing to exalt herself, she says of her messenger:

The man hath seen some majesty, and should know.

Her whole behaviour toward Antony is dominated by an element of calculation. Here again the reflection of her character in the exposition shows us the way. "She is cunning past man's thought," says Antony of her (I, ii, 142). And, indeed, the little feminine tricks related by Plutarch are harmless in comparison with the marvellous astuteness and proficiency of this thoroughbred courtesan. Years of intercourse with men since her earliest youth—she now smiles at her naïve innocence in those days—have given her a mastery of all the arts of love that amazes even her frivolous attendants; she knows and successfully uses every means of combating the surfeit of mere sensual enjoyment in her lover which is her greatest danger. This woman is different from Plutarch's heroine in that she does not merge her being into his and make all his interests her own, but, on the contrary, is always on the point of evading him, and continually keeps him running after her. When he comes she goes, and when he is away she charges her maid:

See where he is, who's with him, what he does :  
I did not send you : if you find him sad,  
Say I am dancing ; if in mirth, report  
That I am sudden sick.

I, iii

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

This power of falling ill at the right time, of being seized by swoons and fits, so that she must have her dress unlaced, is always at her disposal, and helps her to render Antony helpless by completely disarming him. It is always she who is suffering through him, and in every case her cleverness puts him in the wrong. If he is not sad at the death of his wife it is a sign of what a loving woman may expect of him, and if he is sad he shows that his real love belonged to the other woman and not to her (I, iii). She carries the art of sulking to perfection, and torments him in order to be the more assured of possessing him. At the same time there is a certain amount of cruelty in her joy at seeing him floundering so helplessly in her net. Yet her great cleverness always makes her recognize the moment when, his endurance being near the breaking-point, he might grow tired of the eternal war and begin to break away from her. Nevertheless, she loves him after her fashion, though the selfish and superficial character of her love is clearly revealed in the vain remark she addresses to Charmian:

Did I, Charmian,  
Ever love Cæsar so ?

Her feeling is indeed a complex mixture of various emotions. On the one hand she is merely craving for erotic excitement, and more enamoured of Antony's love than of himself; on the other it flatters her vanity and gives her a sense of triumph to see the great hero her obedient slave. Her pride in having conquered him naturally allows us to suppose that she admires him, but this need not be a sign, as some have believed, that she also loves him. It is rather a proof of her cleverness that her long intimacy with him has not produced in her case what, according to the proverb, familiarity usually breeds in ordinary people, viz., contempt. That Antony's love means much to her we can easily believe, knowing her calculating nature. But not only upon such motives does her affection rest. Her behaviour, especially her excitement in the scene with the messenger coming from him, reveals a remarkable degree of passion. We should be wrong, however, in assuming that this love

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

would render her capable of sacrificing aught for his sake. She never regards anything from his point of view. For this reason we should not feel inclined to prophesy that this love would be of long duration, especially in view of her heartlessness, which reveals itself distinctly in her indifference to the fate of Cæsar's messenger. Antony finds her flirting with him, and in his indignation orders him to be whipped, without her putting in a word for him.

This is Cleopatra as she appears in the first acts of the play. There is a world of difference between her and the queen of Plutarch's narrative. What we have before us is a wonderful portrait, drawn with Shakespeare's consummate skill, of an intelligent, passionate, astute, heartless, essentially vulgar, and profoundly immoral creature, but by no means a remarkable or "nobly planned" woman. We must therefore think it rather curious that a number of critics grow quite enthusiastic not so much about the excellence of the portrayal as about the figure itself, that Arthur Symonds calls her the most wonderful woman created by Shakespeare, and Georg Brandes says: "In drawing her Shakespeare thought of one who to him had been the one woman in the world" (p. 653). It is not impossible that Shakespeare might have had good reasons for replying to this view in a way which would have come perilously near Heine's verses:

Friends we never came to be,  
Rarely were your feelings mine;  
But how soon we did agree  
When we met among the swine!

But the question arises whether we have not here a case similar to that of Julius Cæsar—*i.e.*, whether we do not base our interpretation too much upon the actual appearance of the character; that is to say, is the effect upon us different from that which the author originally intended? A number of critics have regarded the matter in this light and have thought that Shakespeare has merely omitted, by an oversight, to insert a scene in which Cleopatra's grace, wit, or any other of her attractions were actually shown. This omission, however, is not at all unintentional; it is

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

the natural result of his conception. That Shakespeare regarded the purely sensual attraction which Cleopatra possessed for Antony as the principal cause of her power over him we can see from the reflection of her character in the mind of Enobarbus, which is of such great technical importance:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety : other women cloy  
The appetites they feed : but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies ; for vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish.

II, ii

And in another passage (II, vi), wishing to emphasize the purely physical nature of the bond which holds them together, he designates her quite briefly and contemptuously as Mark Antony's "Egyptian dish."

The contradiction between this picture of Cleopatra and the character Shakespeare gives her in the last two acts, after the position of Antony has become hopeless, is astonishing. The consistent development of the character Shakespeare has put before us in the first part would require that she should endeavour to extricate herself from the fate that threatens Antony. But she does not make any attempt to do so, if we except the insignificant flirtation with Thyreus, the messenger of Octavius. That her ships go over to the enemy and thereby accelerate his downfall is at the time regarded by the suspicious Antony as a piece of treachery on her part, but a number of critics (Vischer, p. 174 ; Kreyssig, p. 437) do her grave injustice in thinking her really guilty. This accusation is conclusively proved to be unjust by the express assurance which Cleopatra sends to the dying Antony through Diomedes that he is wrong in suspecting her of having conspired with the enemy against him. Supposing the intention had merely been to throw dust in Antony's eyes, an 'aside' would have been necessary in order to enlighten the spectators.

We may be quite certain, however, that Cleopatra is not faithless to Antony. In this case there is no suspicion

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of treachery even in the original. If in the beginning of the play Shakespeare appears to have deprived her of some of the good qualities she possesses in Plutarch, he makes up for this by raising her at this stage of the action actually above Plutarch's estimate. Plutarch, indeed, in another part of his narrative, says that Octavius, fearing lest she might prevent her great treasures from falling into the hands of her enemies by burning them, from time to time secretly sent her messengers in order to set her mind at rest about the approach of his army. This Shakespeare omits. Avarice as a petty quality of the character of Octavius was probably regarded by him as not in keeping with the idealized mental picture he gives of him, and similarly his conception of Cleopatra at this stage is so high that he cannot represent her as in any way faithless or treacherous. On the contrary, he eagerly adopts the remark of Plutarch that she tried to combat Antony's mistrust and suspicion by "making more of him than ever she did." All the clamorous and pretentious part of her has now disappeared, and for a while she is nothing but a thoughtful and motherly woman. There is a touch of soft conjugal tenderness in all she says or does. When helping him to arm for the fight, and in parting with him (IV, iv), she almost reminds us of the way in which Desdemona speaks to Othello. At the same time her cleverness makes her recognize quite clearly how hopeless his position is in face of the vastly superior forces which the enemy has brought against the city. Though her heart does not break with woe, yet she is filled with regret and sorrow, and almost forgets her own fate in his. Then the going over of her fleet brings about the collapse; Antony for the first time completely loses his confidence in her. So far he had deliberately shut his eyes to the inevitable approach of catastrophe. Now, however, the thought that Cleopatra's supposed betrayal has been the cause of his ruin, though in reality it has only accelerated it a little, makes him behave like a madman; he thrusts her from him, and is even prepared to give the order for her death. Then, rightly afraid of him, she takes refuge in her so-called monument and, in

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

order to bring him to his senses, sends him word that she has killed herself. When it is too late she recognizes with horror that the means employed by her have been too dangerous. The messenger whom she sends out in her terrible anxiety confirms her fears: Antony has concluded that his duty is to follow her, and the message that she is still alive is brought to a dying man.

Kreyssig (p. 451) regards this behaviour of Cleopatra as "acting a death comedy." But there are no traces of the actress to be found in her in these scenes, no sign of frivolity or exaggeration. On the contrary, she is frightened and depressed during the whole time. In support of Kreyssig's view the argument will perhaps be brought forward that she ought to know Antony's passionate character well enough to be aware of the fatal effect her message might produce. The question may also be asked whether she is not preparing a kind of last consolation for Antony when she carefully instructs the messenger to say that her last word had been "Antony." Neither of these objections, however, finds any confirmation in the text. If Shakespeare had desired to give this interpretation to the facts, he could easily have suggested it by means of a few words exchanged between Cleopatra and her attendant. As it is, we have only the remark expressly made by Cleopatra's messenger that she had been seized with fear of the consequences *after* despatching the message of her death ("fearing since . . .," IV, xii, 125). There is no valid reason for doubting this statement. The dying Antony has himself conveyed to her, and now Cleopatra suddenly appears in a light in which we have never seen her before. Juliet at the bier of Romeo could not have thrown herself on her lover with a more profound, more serious, and more passionate grief than Cleopatra now shows. With her own delicate hands, that are unused to any kind of work, she helps to draw the heavy load of his body up to the monument, and embraces him with the fervour of despair. Now, in her grief, she is all tenderness, all passionate devotion, all genuine, unselfish love. There is no false note in the expression of her feeling, no pettiness



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

in her thoughts. The touching advice of the dying man, to "seek her honour with her safety" at the hands of Cæsar, his adversary, she refuses with the magnificent words: "They do not go together." When he dies in her arms she utters the woeful cry of a human being forced to surrender the very core of its existence.

From this moment life for her has ceased to be worth living. The wife of Brutus could not find more magnificent words for defying and wrangling with Fate than are uttered by this unfortunate woman after her servants have recalled her from her swoon :

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded  
By such poor passion as the maid that milks  
And does the meanest chares. It were for me  
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods ;  
To tell them that this world did equal theirs  
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught ;  
Patience is sottish, and impatience does  
Become a dog that's mad : then is it sin  
To rush into the secret house of death,  
Ere death dare come to us ? How do you, women ?  
What, what ! good cheer ! Why, how now, Charmian !  
My noble girls ! Ah, women, women, look,  
Our lamp is spent, it's out ! Good sirs, take heart :  
We'll bury him ; and then, what's brave, what's noble,  
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
And make death proud to take us. Come, away :  
This case of that huge spirit now is cold :  
Ah, women, women ! come ; we have no friend  
But resolution, and the briefest end.

IV, xiii

We see that she has acquired an iron strength with the calm of the resolution she has taken in these last words. Now for the first time, when she feels her loss so deeply that it makes her as poor as any peasant girl, does she really look like a queen, and a queen she remains during the negotiations of the last act. There is something truly sublime in her attitude, which resembles that of a Thusnelda in chains, when, having been disarmed by the victors, she goes back in her musings to the past and, staring in front

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS *enriched solemnly*

of her with suppressed passion, conjures up the image of Mark Antony in superhuman dimensions :

His face was as the heavens : and therein stuck  
 A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted  
 The little O, the earth. . . .  
 His legs bestrid the ocean : his rear'd arm  
 Crested the world : his voice was propertyed  
 As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends ;  
 But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,  
 He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,  
 There was no winter in't ; an autumn 'twas  
 That grew the more by reaping ; his delights  
 Were dolphin-like ; they show'd his back above  
 The element they lived in : in his livery  
 Walk'd crowns and crownets ; realms and islands were  
 As plates dropp'd from his pocket.

V, ii

This impression cannot be diminished even by the scene with Seleucus, her treasurer, which has already been described. Shakespeare, moreover, in this scene has so far taken into account the general conception of Cleopatra in this part of the play as to restrict the outburst of her temper to a few very violent words addressed to the faithless servant. For Cleopatra now is always the captive queen. No wonder that she finds her 'Mortimer' in Dolabella, the Roman officer who betrays to her the secret plan of Octavius to make her walk in his triumphal procession. Against this humiliation, however, her pride rebels. As Kreyssig says, the words in which she speaks of this danger threatening her reveal rather an aristocratic horror of coming in contact with a low and plebeian environment than any fear of material losses:

Now, Iras, what think'st thou ?  
 Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown  
 In Rome, as well as I : mechanic slaves  
 With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall  
 Uplift us to the view ; in their thick breaths,  
 Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,  
 And forced to drink their vapour.

V, ii

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Donning her regal garments and placing her crown upon her head, she chooses rather to die with her majesty unsullied.

It cannot well be doubted that this woman, who now is inwardly as well as outwardly a queen, has but little in common with the harlot of the first part. The Cleopatra whom we see in the time of Antony's good fortune gives us no indication of that moral substructure on which alone the fortitude she shows in adversity can rest. We know her well enough to foresee that she will vent her disappointment in endless and vociferous lamentations and, like old Capulet after receiving the news of Juliet's death, first of all and principally bewail her own sad lot. There was far too much calculation in her love to make it possible for her, at a moment when her own existence was in such imminent danger, to mourn so passionately and exclusively for another being. In her nature there was so much pettiness and vulgarity that she was quite unable to acknowledge and express in such sublime language the greatness of the fallen hero. Her life had rendered her far too aimless, undisciplined, and enervated to be capable now of seizing the helm in such an iron grip, and without repining steering straight on to the rocks. By means of that self-characterization which (*cf.* p. 30 *seq.*) gives us the most valuable key with which to unlock the problems of Shakespeare's characters, she informs us that in her last resolutions she wanted to do "what's brave, what's noble" (V, ii). This point is decisive. The character of Cleopatra in the first acts has hardly a trace of nobility. Being noble means acting magnanimously, renouncing, without hesitation, material advantages for the sake of a higher purpose, triumphing over ignoble instincts. But the Cleopatra of the first acts is merely a creature of sense who has been raised above the animal level by means of training and refinement, and whose ungoverned sensuality is checked only by a supreme power of calculation. There is no human being for whose sake she would make the least sacrifice, and her life's one and only ideal is pleasure. It is impossible to credit her with the behaviour shown in the last two acts.

This lack of consistency in the development of Cleopatra's

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

character has not been overlooked by all the critics. Most of them have tried to explain it away either by taking a more favourable view of her in the first part, or making her out to be worse than she really is in the second part, or maybe both at the same time. Even Kreyssig, who is perhaps the best psychologist among Shakespearean critics, apparently thinks it necessary to render the Cleopatra of the final catastrophe more credible and more in accordance with that of the first part by throwing a false light upon her. As regards her touching behaviour at the sight of the bleeding Antony, he admits that it is not that of a capricious coquette, but the true sign of an heroic nature. His explanation, however, is that her "poetic excitability for the moment prevails over her desire to live and her habit of calculation" (p. 452), and of the end he says: "The picture of her here given, charming and seductive rather than truly sympathetic, reaches the highest point which intellect and beauty without moral excellence are capable of attaining." These are poor makeshifts. A critic always falls back upon explaining actions by means of passing moods when he is at his wits' end (*cf.* p. 223). That Shakespeare here has no intention of presenting emotions that suddenly rise and are gone in a moment is shown by the fact that they are not followed by any reaction; and the fact that she carries out the grievous resolutions she has formed without a moan or a complaint proves the sterling moral quality of the woman. It is also quite unjust to condemn her for putting on her regal garments before going to her death, as some critics have done. It is an almost ridiculous misunderstanding of her motives to see in this action merely a sign of "vanity, artifice, and voluptuousness" (MacCallum, p. 438). She owes it to her position as queen to prefer death to shameful captivity, and it is perfectly intelligible that she should wish to perform this sacrifice, which she offers to her dignity and of the greatness of which she is fully conscious, with all the rites due to the solemnity of the moment; in fact, this last regard she pays to outward appearances harmonizes perfectly with the sublime style of her whole behaviour.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

The attempts to prove that the Cleopatra of the last two acts bears the same physiognomy as that of the first part of the play must therefore be regarded, for the most part, as failures. We are dealing here with a dramatic peculiarity which we shall find again in many parts of Shakespeare's work. An authpress who has already been mentioned several times shows in her discriminating criticism of Ophelia that a similar gap appears in the character of this figure also. To the worldly young lady whom we find on the one side of a boundary-line which passes through the middle of the play there corresponds the "mermaid-like Ophelia" on the other, and it is only the interplay of the two quite differently illuminated spheres that creates the mysterious *chiaroscuro* in which the figure is merged, which reminds us so much of modern dramatic methods, and has therefore given rise to ever new interpretations.<sup>1</sup> But this is not the only parallel. It has been noticed that the figure of Ariel in *The Tempest* is also of this dual character, that originally the prevalent conception was that of a good-natured medieval demon, whereas toward the end of the play the figure manifestly approaches the type of a fairy.<sup>2</sup> Caliban is another instance. In the exposition of *The Tempest* he is sullen and defiant; in the comic action which follows he appears as a coward. Troilus, at the beginning of the play, is conceived as much less ideal than afterward (*cf.* above, p. 57), etc., etc. More exhaustive researches would reveal still other cases of this kind.

The question now remains to be answered how these contradictions, which are so very remarkable and disturbing, arise. The simplest explanation is found in the method of work described at the beginning of this chapter. There are many other things in *Antony and Cleopatra* which create the impression that it more than any other was composed according to the 'single-scene' method. The way in which Shakespeare has cut up Plutarch's narrative into a succession of co-ordinated scenes is not a sign, despite the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gertrud Landsberg, *Ophelia*; Schücking and Deutschbein's "Neue Anglistische Arbeiten," No. 1, p. 85 *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Luce, "Arden" edition, p. 284; and *cf.* below.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

great mastery of characterization shown, of a careful mental digestion and welding together of the materials found in the original source. When contrasted with the firm handling of the plot that we find in *Julius Cæsar* or *Macbeth*, this play on the whole shows a decided falling off. Considerable portions must be regarded as dramatically ineffective from the point of view of progressive action. We see, for instance, in the second act the Triumvirs coming to an understanding with Sextus Pompeius, their enemy, and celebrating the event on board his galley with a great banquet. The poet seems to have taken a great delight in depicting this feast. At the end almost the whole company are drunk; they join hands, dance, and, as was the custom at Egyptian revels, unite their hoarse voices in an attempt to sing the burden of a song. This may be productive of a certain stage effect, but it completely *isolates the scene*, detaching it from the context of the whole in a manner which is unequalled even in Shakespeare. There are other cases of the procedure employed in the second part of that act, in which the whole action is made to follow the example of the dancers and keep turning round on the same spot.

We know that here the older form of the primitive epic drama comes to light again. Brandes holds a different view. He makes the attempt (p. 661) to prove that Shakespeare purposely selected this form in order to produce a continual change of persons, scenes, and dates to give a structureless character to the action, and thereby to create the impression that a fight of unparalleled dimensions was being presented, a struggle going on not in a confined space, but with the whole world for its stage and for its object. There can be no doubt that this point of view would have seemed absurd to an Elizabethan. He could never have understood why, in order to express a sublime idea in the most adequate manner, the most primitive form available should have been chosen. This assumption bears so evidently the stamp of the nineteenth century that no serious discussion of it is possible. Another erroneous opinion is that of Walzel (*Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, lii),

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

who fancied he could recognize in the form of the play a special artistic tendency of the 'baroque' style, and thought himself entitled to contradict the view which Wolff had already shown to be the true one, viz., that Shakespeare had omitted to draw up a detailed plan of the drama and therefore had been compelled to follow as closely as possible the order of events given by Plutarch.

But quite apart from the form chosen or the intended dramatic formlessness, there are to be clearly discerned many isolated signs of a rapid and careless workmanship. In numerous places it becomes imperative to look up the corresponding passage in Plutarch in order to understand what is meant. The spectator must be completely puzzled, for instance, when he hears Pompey the younger say to Mark Antony,

O Antony,

You have my father's house,—But, what? We are friends,

which, as is seen from Plutarch, refers to the fact that Antony had not paid for the house he had bought of Pompey the father (II, vii, 136). Not much more intelligible is II, vi, 27. When Antony, mad with rage, has caused Cæsar's messenger to Cleopatra to be whipped he charges him to tell Cæsar that, in order to revenge himself, he may torture Hipparchus, Antony's freedman (III, xi). The joke, however, remains unintelligible, as we are not informed of what Plutarch relates, viz., that this very Hipparchus had deserted and betrayed Antony. When the breach between Antony and Cleopatra occurs the Queen's attendant suggests to her to repair "to the monument." Cleopatra takes up the cry: "To the monument" (IV, xi, 3 *seq.*). But the author forgets that, though Plutarch in an earlier passage has given a detailed account of this monument, he himself has not said a single word concerning it.

In one instance one cannot help suspecting that Shakespeare so quickly ran over the text of the original source that he read only the gloss on the margin, which gave an abstract of the contents, not the text itself, the result of

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

which was a curious misunderstanding in the drama. In IV, x, we read:

Swallows have built

In Cleopatra's sails their nests : the augurers  
Say they know not, they cannot tell ; look grimly  
And dare not speak their knowledge.

The source says : " Swallows had bred under the poope of her shippe and there came others after them that drave away the first and plucked down their neasts." The gloss abbreviates : " An ill signe, foreshewed by swallowes breeding in Cleopatraes shippe." This summary, however, reverses the sense ; for not the fact that swallows were nesting in the ship, but that they were driven thence by other swallows, was the bad omen. Shakespeare read so carelessly that he transcribed the sense of the marginal gloss instead of the sense of the text. Of other errors which are indicative of an insufficient digestion of the material we shall have to treat later on. One would like to ask now whether even in these mistakes a wise intention will be seen, or how the orthodox Shakespeareans who discover the profoundest artistic purpose precisely in those places where the master's " brush has slipped " will explain such passages. As the case stands, the most obvious way to explain it is to trace the contradiction in the character back to the general technique of the play and to the tendency toward making the scenes independent. The Cleopatra who treats Antony, the heir of Hercules, as Omphale treated her hero is an independent conception, and the Cleopatra who refuses to accept an unworthy end of her life's tragedy has also been created as a complete and separate individual.

An explanation of the fact that Shakespeare has given the first Cleopatra a character so inferior to that of Plutarch's heroine may be found in the traditional view of her as the great courtesan. He had to deal with a public whose thinking was so much fettered by conventional standards with regard to female virtue that he was obliged to represent a woman who was liable to be charged with adultery as morally deficient in other respects also.

Lastly, a special circumstance may have influenced the



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

characterization of Cleopatra in the first acts, viz., that in her case Shakespeare was probably drawing from the life to an extent so far unknown in his work. The striking resemblance of some of her principal traits to the features of the 'Dark Lady' in the Sonnets, which makes us incline to accept this view, has often been noticed (*cf.* MacCallum, p. 449; Brandes, p. 662 *seq.*; Wolff, p. 257). But even apart from this we occasionally find in the play that special graphic details are used for characterizing her which are manifestly derived from the observation of some definite person to an extent that is found in few other plays of Shakespeare. A description of the peculiar sensual attraction which she exercises, given by Enobarbus, is clearly founded on an individual impression received by a fully attentive observer from a living person. He says :

I saw her once  
Hop forty paces through the public street ;  
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,  
That she did make defect perfection,  
And, breathless, power breathe forth.

II, ii

This is an unconnected statement quite irrelevant to the action, and of course there is no hint of it in Plutarch. By a combination of such single realistic touches he produces a masterpiece of portraiture, a clearly outlined drawing from the life, very different from the second Cleopatra, who is an ideal figure, like Imogen or Desdemona, and several degrees farther removed from reality.

To a certain extent he may have become conscious of this dualism. So we hear it stated that Cleopatra's character has undergone a process of development. Like Macbeth, who at the end of his career says that he has become a different man from what he was before (*cf.* p. 79), Cleopatra feels that she has changed completely :

I have nothing  
Of woman in me : now from head to foot  
I am marble-constant ; now the fleeting moon  
No planet is of mine.

V, ii

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Here a difficulty arises. If Shakespeare in this passage explicitly refers to a development of Cleopatra's character, can we still say that he is inconsistent in his characterization? This question must be answered in the affirmative, inasmuch as the Cleopatra of the first part has been designed without regard to the mental and moral physiognomy which the historical facts in Shakespeare's source make it imperative for Cleopatra to possess toward the end of the play. So the reference to the development of her character is merely a kind of afterthought. Had Shakespeare conceived Cleopatra as a consistent character from the very beginning of the work, which he apparently omitted to do, just as he failed to create a unity of action, there would have been at least some slight indications of the traits which were to come out in the later development. In the case of Lady Macbeth this fault has not been committed, because we are prepared for her final collapse by a number of incidents occurring in the preceding acts. No such preparation is made for Cleopatra's sudden change. We may find it easier to regard the absence of unity in the character as a sign of development if we consider certain rather unconvincing developments of female characters in famous dramas of the time, and we may even imagine that, in one detail, Shakespeare was slightly influenced by them. In Thomas Dekker's *Honest Whore* we are shown how a common prostitute is reformed by love and changed into an honest woman. This oldest predecessor of the Lady of the Camellias receives the first impulse that awakens in her the desire for regeneration from a speech in which a man to whom she is making love at the time casts in her face his extreme disgust of her trade and her person. (Not dissimilar is the psychological process in the famous *Maid's Tragedy* by Beaumont and Fletcher, apparently a later play, in which the morally degenerate mistress of the King is aroused from her indifference and turned into a new being by her brother expressing his unvarnished disgust at her depravity and, in a violent outburst of indignation, even threatening to strike her.) It almost seems as if there were a similar crisis in the life of Cleopatra.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

For here too there comes a moment when Antony's wrath surges fiercely up, and vents itself in a flood of moral invective. It is the scene (III, xi) where Antony finds her flirting with Cæsar's messenger, through whom she is about to open conversations with his master, the critical moment in which she appears to be going over to the opposite side. He then inveighs with inexpressible indignation against the woman for the sake of whose love he has sacrificed a world, and who now desires to cast him off in order to make friends with his inexorable enemy :

You were half blasted ere I knew you : ha ! . . .  
I found you as a morsel cold upon  
Dead Cæsar's trencher ; nay, you were a fragment  
Of Cneius Pompey's ; besides what hotter hours,  
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have  
Luxuriously pick'd out : for, I am sure,  
Though you can guess what temperance should be,  
You know not what it is.

The effect of this moral chastisement is astonishing. No word of contradiction betrays that the woman whom he reprimands so severely feels herself insulted. On the contrary, like a child that has been punished, she gives him henceforth no occasion for anger. If a development of her character were to be admitted its crisis would lie in this passage. But the comparison with a proper drama of character development like *The Honest Whore* shows clearly that the resemblance is only apparent and the problem of an essentially different kind. If Shakespeare had really wished to show development he would doubtless, like Dekker and Beaumont and Fletcher, have made the woman at the decisive moment become aware of her conversion and openly confess it. Of this, however, there is not the slightest indication in the play. It is not a question of a coherent plan of psychological development in the mind of the dramatist, but of the "step by step" method of dramatization, as Grillparzer styles it. This is the reason, as has been demonstrated above, why the two physiog-

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

nomies, at the beginning and at the end of the play, are so irreconcilable.

4. PARTS OF THE ORIGINAL HISTORICAL ACTION NOT ASSIMILATED (CLEOPATRA; MALCOLM).—In establishing the fact that Cleopatra in the concluding acts of the play shows a personality not sufficiently in agreement with that in the first part, we have to be prepared for an objection which, as we shall see, leads to a problem of fundamental importance for Shakespearean exegesis. Some critics, like Brandes (p. 668), maintain that Shakespeare has represented Cleopatra in a much less favourable light than Plutarch. They are of opinion that in Plutarch's narrative her behaviour toward Cæsar after she has been taken prisoner, especially her attempt to conceal her treasures from him, is not to be taken seriously, but that her purpose is only to mislead Cæsar and make him believe her desirous of continuing her existence, in order that she may not be prevented from committing suicide. As regards Shakespeare's representation, these critics think that there she really endeavours to come to an understanding with Octavius, is quite sincerely anxious to save her treasures, and commits suicide only when she finds out that neither the admiration of her beauty nor any feeling of compassion can turn the cool-headed victor from his purpose of making her walk in his triumphal procession. This interpretation, however, does not do justice to the facts. Shakespeare found in Plutarch that Cleopatra twice made very serious but ineffectual attempts to take her life, but that for a time she made Cæsar believe that she was ready to live on when he frightened her with the fate of her children—that Cæsar was very rejoiced to see, as he thought, a sign of this desire in her explanation that she had attempted to defraud him upon the advice of Seleucus, her treasurer, merely in order to keep some objects of value with which to win the favour of Octavia and Livia. This explanation of her conduct, however, had been given only in order to lull his suspicions. When, immediately afterward, she received the information from Dolabella that her removal to Rome had secretly been resolved upon she made the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

third attempt at suicide by means of the Nile serpents, and this time with success. From this account we learn that her resolution had indeed been shaken for a while. This idea, however, was not in accordance with Shakespeare's intention of bringing about an heroic conclusion. He omits altogether her second attempt to commit suicide by means of starvation, and never puts a word into her mouth that could throw the slightest doubt upon her steadfastness. The very moment that Antony is dead she is made to appear so stricken with grief that we feel that she has done with life. In one of the last lines of Act IV she says:

We'll bury him ; and then, what's brave, what's noble,  
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
And make death proud to take us.

This idea she holds fast. But if she is resolved to die why then does she send messengers to Cæsar to inquire what he is proposing to do with her, and why does she still try to conceal some of her treasures, as Seleucus discovers?<sup>1</sup> The critics have seen herein a weakening of her resolution, which they find quite intelligible in view of our previous acquaintance with her character. "The body of her dead past," MacCallum says, "weighs her down and she cannot advance steadily in the higher altitudes. She wavers in her determination to die, as is implied by her retention of her treasure, and 'the courtesan's instincts of venality and falsehood' (Boas) still assert their sway."

<sup>1</sup> Certain critics have for this reason managed to interpret the whole treacherous action of Seleucus as preconcerted, and Cleopatra's indignation as a premeditated piece of acting. In support of this view they adduce the words of Plutarch: "He [Cæsar] took his leave of her, supposing he had deceived her, but in deede he was deceived him selfe." They also add North's gloss: "Cleopatra finely deceiveth Octavius Cæsar, as though she desired to live." But this is a gross misunderstanding. What Plutarch wishes to say is that Cleopatra's *explanation* of her fraud, not the whole incident, was a clever move for suggesting the idea to Cæsar that in wanting to keep something for presents she was thinking of the future and had no wish to die. MacCallum, who does not believe either that this incident was preconcerted, thinks he has found another way out of the difficulty in the discovery that the things she wishes to conceal are the jewels with which she intends to adorn herself afterward when she goes to her death! But if Shakespeare had this excellent idea, why did he not bring it to light himself but wait for MacCallum's pen to come along and relieve him of this necessity?

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

But if this had been Shakespeare's intention why then does he not make her say a single word to her confidantes to the effect that she is afraid of death and still thinks of subduing Cæsar? Why do her wonderful speeches express only royal self-esteem and iron resolution? We see that we must reject this view, because it is a thorough misunderstanding of Shakespeare's art-form. The case is decided, here as everywhere else, by the utterances of the heroine herself, which must be taken for Gospel truth. They also clearly prove how hopeless the attempt is to explain the inconsistency between her action and her resolution by means of an unconscious "hoping against hope" (MacCallum), by counter-currents in her mind, by the idiosyncrasies of a complex soul. These motives too Shakespeare would have indicated, through the words either of the heroine herself or of some person in her entourage. The simple truth is this, that by raising her character to a higher moral level he creates difficulties from which he cannot extricate himself. He took over from his original source, at least in large outlines, a course of action which no longer agreed with the character as he had idealized it. As a matter of history, Antony and Cleopatra did not die together, so he did not dare to depart so far from history as to make her kill herself over Antony's body, and thus we get a heroine who presents a problem similar to Hamlet's, and for reasons that are not unlike those in his case. She is resolved; then why does not she act? *This close adherence to historical fact produces a conflict between character and action.*

The case is of typical interest. It shows how Shakespeare may become dependent on the historical fact to an extent which seriously imperils the dramatic sense of the play. It is certain that in this respect also his working methods cannot easily be systematized and reduced to a simple formula. It would be too sweeping a statement to maintain that he does not weigh the facts of his sources in regard to their psychological significance for the characters, but still in the end this is what it very nearly comes to. In a case like the one just described he incorporates,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

so to speak, the architectural design of the narrative found in the historical source in his dramatic edifice, but leaves certain portions of the original structure standing, without noticing apparently that in his altered ground-plan they interrupt the continuity of the whole and act as obstructions. An episode like the one with Seleucus, the treasurer, would in another place have been perfectly in keeping with the character of Cleopatra, but after she has so solemnly announced her firm resolution to die we no longer understand why she still wishes to conceal jewels. Here, therefore, it is the preservation of historical details incapable of being dovetailed into the new context created by the poet which gives rise to difficulties that, of course, become the critics' meat and drink; here they may exercise their ingenuity, eliciting hidden meanings, and excogitating artistic subtleties of which neither the author nor any spectator in the Globe Theatre can have had the slightest inkling.

Closely related to Shakespeare's dependence on the external features of his original material is his general attitude toward the psychological probability of the historically recorded fact. It is most characteristic of him that he does not rebel against his historic model to which he owes so much, but unhesitatingly submits to it even where it reports events that are quite impossible from a psychological point of view. For instance, he found in Holinshed the pretty story of how Macduff, fleeing from Scotland to escape the fury of the tyrant Macbeth, comes to Malcolm, the legitimate pretender to the throne, and implores him to take in hand the liberation of the sorely oppressed country. Malcolm, however, fearing that the tyrant has sent Macduff for the purpose of sounding and entrapping him, and in order to put him to the test, declares that Scotland would gain nothing by such a change of rulers, that, on the contrary, it had better follow the example of the fox who objected to the swarm of flies being chased off his body because the old ones were at least fairly satisfied, whereas new ones would be still hungry. He describes himself as an insatiable voluptuary, avaricious beyond

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

measure, unjust, hypocritical, false, mendacious, fickle, malicious, and cruel—in brief, as a veritable sink of iniquity. Macduff has come to terms with the vices first described to him, but at last he loses all confidence and turns away from him weeping, and with the cry of despair that under these conditions there is no help for his unhappy country. This very recoil, however, proves to Malcolm how great his sincerity is ; the Prince's mistrust disappears ; he takes him in his arms and lays his cards upon the table.

In this story a realistic writer would have found only the nucleus of a dramatic composition. To direct dramatization it is absolutely refractory, for it must be evident to a child that a man having all the vices described will not reveal himself in that manner. The proper thing for Malcolm to do was to *pretend* to be such a man, to *simulate* the character which he confesses in words. As the case stands, this Malcolm must be a most ridiculous simpleton, believing, as he does, in good earnest that a grown-up man could say of himself :

It is myself I mean ; in whom I know  
 All the particulars of vice so grafted,  
 That, when they shall be open'd, black Macbeth  
 Will seem as pure as snow ; and the poor state  
 Esteem him as a lamb, being compar'd  
 With my confineless harms. . . . There's no bottom, none,  
 In my voluptuousness : your wives, your daughters,  
 Your matrons, and your maids, could not fill up  
 The cistern of my lust ; and my desire  
 All continent impediments would o'erbear,  
 That did oppose my will. . . . With this, there grows  
 In my most ill-compos'd affection such  
 A stanchless avarice, that, were I king,  
 I should cut off the nobles for their lands ;  
 Desire his jewels, and this other's house :  
 And my more-having would be as a sauce  
 To make me hunger more ; that I should forge  
 Quarrels unjust against the good and loyal,  
 Destroying them for wealth. . . .

. . . The king-becoming graces  
 As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,  
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,  
I have no relish of them ; but abound  
In the division of each several crime,  
Acting it many ways. Nay, had I power I should  
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,  
Uproar the universal peace, confound  
All unity on earth.

Macduff, however, cannot really believe this ; he is not such a simpleton, nor is the Prince unknown to him. For this reason Vischer (ii, p. 120) is not quite satisfied with the passage, and thinks it too improbable and too closely copied from the original. It is, however, to be taken into consideration that, to a certain extent (*cf.* pp. 29-52), direct self-characterization belongs to the primitive dramatic traditions. The villain who informs the audience of the 'villainies' he himself has set on foot, Julius Cæsar who discourses on his own greatness, may have caused the dramatization of this inherently impossible story to appear in a somewhat different light. This circumstance, however, cannot be of decisive importance. The question then remains whether it is the respect for historical tradition which makes the author feel himself entitled only to dramatize, not to criticize—in other words, whether by the mere fact of their being *historical* these events had acquired, so to speak, a kind of scientific sanction in his eyes. A glance over a neighbouring field of investigation, where conditions are so similar that no conclusive answer is possible without taking them into account, will show us that this view is entirely out of the question.

5. THE FILLING IN OF THE GIVEN OUTLINE OF THE ACTION (HAMLET).—One of the greatest obstacles to the establishment of complete harmony between character and action in Shakespeare's work is naturally the inferior part the character plays as compared with the action in the conception of the drama. In real life the actions depend on the character, the character on the disposition. For this reason we judge the characters of men by their actions. Though Shakespeare naturally held the same

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

opinion, yet his dramatic practice was different. Earlier Shakespearean research, because it overlooked this circumstance, was unable, in many cases, to find out the truth. Victor Hugo quite seriously believed that Shakespeare first imagined the wonderful figures and then created the drama for them. "When he had dreamt and found the image of Cordelia," he says, "Shakespeare created the drama of *King Lear*." Gervinus, too, in one place says in plain words: "In Shakespeare's plays the action is always secondary, derivative, a subsidiary growth; the true centre of unity of his works always leads to the fountain-head of the actions, to the acting human beings themselves, and to the hidden origins, from which their actions arise" (iii, p. 260). And even Kuno Fischer (p. 32) says in his peculiar Polonius-like manner that all the stories told by the previous critics of Hamlet about his lack of energy are disproved by the *story of Hamlet* itself, by his fight with the pirates, in which he displays the courage of a lion, etc. Historical literary research shows that such views directly reverse the actual dependence of character and action, Shakespeare's mode of work being, as we have already seen, quite contrary to that with which his critics credit him. Almost throughout he works upon a given plot, the characters of which he develops, individualizes, and fills with warm life-blood. But this is a method of composition along prearranged lines. It can lead to quite satisfactory results only if the action, which has not always been invented by good psychologists, is changed wherever it contains manifest inconsistencies so as to produce unity of character. But this Shakespeare does only in a very few cases. The example of Cleopatra has already shown us that he is afraid of departing from the historical action in more important details. Now the investigation of the genetic connexions of the non-historical dramas will teach us to recognize the same peculiarity with similar consequences.

The most instructive and best-known example is to be found in the character of Hamlet. Here Shakespeare had before him a play which is lost to us, the main outlines of which, however, we can reconstruct without much

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

difficulty, especially as we possess a very crude and distorted, but at the same time exceedingly instructive copy of it in the German *Hamlet*, the so-called *Fratricide Punished*.<sup>1</sup> In this work Kyd had created, as a counterpart to his famous *Spanish Tragedy*, a kind of "Danish Tragedy." *The Spanish Tragedy* had become the most popular drama of his time. His *Hamlet* had found less favour with the public, though it cannot be said to have remained unnoticed. The observant critic will not fail to notice the reasons of its small success. This play too opens (*cf.* Lewis, p. 69 *seq.*) with the night-watch at Elsinore; Horatio is informed by the members of the watch of the appearance of the ghost, who immediately shows himself. Hamlet joins the company, suffering and weakened by the death of his father, his sorrow at the marriage of his mother so soon after the sad event, and his own exclusion from the succession to the throne. Then the ghost appears again, gives Hamlet to understand by signs that he wishes to speak to him, informs him of the nature of his death, and urges him to take revenge. Hamlet swears that he will fulfil his desire, then asks his friends to promise on their oath that they will help him. As the ghost, however, intervenes by loudly echoing his words, he sees fit to postpone the explanation of the reason for his request which he has promised to give them, and communicates to Horatio only what he has heard. At the same time he announces to him that he is going to simulate madness, which, he hopes, will greatly help him to fulfil the difficult task of murdering the King.

This motive is emphasized once more in *Fratricide Punished*, and therefore, we may be sure, also in Kyd's *Urhamlet*.<sup>2</sup> No great effort is required to show that it is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Creizenach, *Die Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*; Kürschner's *National-Literatur*, vol. xxiii, p. 125 *seq.*; Charlton M. Lewis, *The Genesis of Hamlet* (New York, 1907), p. 47 *seq.*; G. Landsberg, *Ophelia*, p. 46 *seq.*, note.

<sup>2</sup> II. 5: "Horatio, my esteemed friend, by means of this assumed madness I hope to find occasion to avenge my father's death. You know, however, that my uncle is always surrounded by many retainers, therefore, in case I should be unsuccessful and you should find my body, I pray you give it an honest funeral, for on the first opportunity that I shall find, I shall try to get at him."

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

not very plausible. Indeed, it is only the comparison with Kyd's original which enables us to understand how the dramatist came to introduce this motive at all. In this, in the tales of Belleforest and also in Saxo Grammaticus, the original source of the Hamlet story, the murder of old Hamlet had been committed quite openly, at the time when the Prince was still a child. The fratricide had therefore to fear the vengeance of the youth as he was growing up. Under these circumstances Hamlet, who was revolving plans of revenge in his mind, naturally acted in the cleverest possible manner in shamming madness and thereby making himself appear harmless. Since Kyd, however, had represented the murder as having taken place secretly, and the murderer, therefore, could have no idea that his victim, returning from purgatory, had revealed the truth to his son, it was more probable that the Prince would create suspicion against himself by the sudden change of his nature. This very obvious idea does not seem to have troubled Kyd. He believed Hamlet's conduct to be sufficiently explained by the expectation that as a supposed lunatic he would be better able to deceive the soldiers by whom the King was constantly surrounded.

The step he had taken is soon discovered to be worse than useless, for the King, as might have been foreseen, immediately takes alarm. Listening to a conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia he finds his suspicion confirmed that the Prince is only simulating madness, and the resolution begins to take shape in his mind to rid himself of this dangerous foe. Hamlet, in the meantime, further pursues his purpose. The appearance of the actors affords him an opportunity, which he eagerly embraces, of removing, by means of a scene inserted in the play, all doubts as to the veracity of the ghost. But when he finds the King alone and is given the first chance of carrying out his purpose of revenge he defers the execution of his plan, though quite convinced now of the King's guilt, because he does not wish to slay him while he is praying. Now follows a visit to the Queen, his mother, during which Polonius is caught eavesdropping and killed. The

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

ghost appears a second time, and Hamlet again promises to avenge him. Then, however, he is sent to England; he escapes from his companions, and after his return at last finds an opportunity of accomplishing his revenge during his duel with Laertes. He kills the King, but himself falls a victim in the attempt.

This, as we see, is a very inferior plot. What probably attracted Kyd in the story is above all the feeling of mystery which pervades the whole, the mutual deceptions, the spying and eavesdropping, the game of intrigue played under the mask of friendship in which life and death are the stakes. Yet one radical fault in this action which was certain to diminish its effect on the stage was the slackening of the tension. Though all sorts of details had been introduced to enliven the action the effect is insignificant. The representation of a "play within the play" might interest so long as the charm of novelty lasted. But this idea had been much better utilized in a number of other dramas, as, for instance, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the avengers, after long and futile endeavours to secure expiation, succeed in arranging an amateur performance with the guilty persons, who all unexpectedly, when the play reaches its tragic climax, change it into deadly earnest. Compared with such effects, the interest of the play in *Hamlet*, which served only to reveal a guilty conscience, was feeble. A great deal of fuss was made about a result which added so little to the progress of the action. Another difficulty was presented by the introduction of a girl who was loosely connected with the hero. But after she had had her one and only moment of importance, serving as decoy in the eavesdropping scene, the poet no longer knew what to do with her. Another drama in which a girl, going mad and singing songs, had proved an effective figure suggested to him the idea of making his heroine become mentally deranged. In contrast, however, to that other drama in which the knot of the play is unravelled by means of it the girl's madness here has scarcely any dramatic significance—that is to say, the action would not take an essentially different course if this trait were missing.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Whether the dramatist had tried to add a further attraction by inventing a scene, similar to that extant in *Fratricide Punished*, in which Hamlet on his journey to England escapes the snares laid for him remains doubtful. In that play two bandits are entrusted with the murder of Hamlet, but he arranges with them that one of them shall stand in front of him and take aim, the other behind; at the moment of firing he throws himself on the ground, so that they shoot each other dead. Such excessive naïvety and drastic clumsiness we are not accustomed to find in Kyd. One thing is clear, however: the action in his version must have stuck and refused to move on; especially after the performance of the inserted play the stream of the action threatens to be choked up altogether. At last a kind of conclusion was somewhat forcibly brought about by the King arranging that fencing bout which must have failed to satisfy even the ordinary spectator, because of the utter improbability that Hamlet, who knows the King to be a most dangerous villain and consequently mistrusts him, would have consented to this proposal.

After all that has been said it does not appear quite certain whether Hamlet's failure to carry out his revenge is due merely, as Lewis thinks (p. 58 *seq.*), to external causes. It is true that in *Fratricide Punished* Hamlet never once reproaches himself with being remiss, and that here the external obstacles play an important part. The scene where Hamlet finds the King absorbed in prayer seems to offer him the first opportunity of carrying out his revenge. Why he makes no use of it is clearly explained by him, and so his hesitation in this case cannot be regarded as a sign of a character disinclined to action. At the same time we may assume that this idea of Kyd's was probably the death, not indeed of the King, but of the whole dramatic interest of the piece. We cannot imagine that the spectators would have continued to trouble themselves about a hero who is constantly assuring them of his thirst for revenge, but at last, when he has the villain in his power, allows him to escape. It was quite in accordance with this feeling that the play was, so to speak,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

given a fresh start with a new appearance and exhortation of the ghost.

We must never forget, however, while making this reconstruction, that the German tragedy, even should it be directly derived from the *Urhamlet*, does not allow any inferences to be drawn regarding the subtler traits of the original, because it is evident that they have become largely obliterated in this crude and garbled version. A sure sign of this is the absence of the monologues which play such an important part in Kyd's work. It will therefore be more advisable to complete the psychological portrait of Hamlet by a reference to Hieronimo, the famous avenger in *The Spanish Tragedy*, also written by the author of the *Urhamlet*. This person, who is in a very similar mental and moral position to Hamlet, will better assist us to gain an approximate impression of him than the shadowy figure in *Fratricide Punished*. Hieronimo has a most expressive mental physiognomy. His profoundly emotional and infinitely sensitive nature is so cruelly wounded by the murder of his son that for a long time he is plunged into the deepest abyss of despair. His mind, embittered and darkened by suffering, is more and more invaded by a great disgust of life, and at last temporarily eclipsed by madness. His passionate craving for revenge being checked in the beginning by his distrust and his endeavour to secure positive evidence, it is necessary that he should be roused later on by his son's betrothed from the apathetic brooding which threatens to overwhelm him and take away from him his power of acting. The salient feature in his physiognomy is "his dwelling on an idea, a passion, which ceaselessly occupies his mind and is embodied by it in ever new and changing images,"<sup>1</sup> thereby undermining his whole mental constitution. Here we can say positively that the obstacles are not merely external, but also such as have their roots in the hero's own soul, and hence there is no reason for supposing that the poet who created both these figures omitted to introduce a similar feature into the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. A. Bieber, *Der Melancholikertypus Shakespeares und sein Ursprung*. "Angl. Arbeiten," No. 3, Heidelberg, 1913, p. 41 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

character of Hamlet, whose life's crisis so closely resembles that of Hieronimo in its external aspects also. We shall probably not be far from the truth in assuming that Shakespeare was chiefly attracted by these things and, when Marston in 1599 had brought the tragedy of revenge into fashion again with his Antonio dramas, was induced to meet the taste of the public for such themes with his treatment of the story of Hamlet.

In this new treatment of the subject and partial revision of the old play Shakespeare worked out the character in accordance with a plan which in a simpler form, as has been shown, was in all likelihood already contained in the play, viz., the *idea of melancholy*.<sup>1</sup> When Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*—in 1601—the 'melancholy type' was almost a fashionable figure, the word 'melancholy' itself a favourite expression. At that time anyone who wished to cut a really distinguished and aristocratic figure pulled his black hat with the long black plume far over his face, wore a long black cloak, and posed, wherever possible, with his arms crossed over his chest. Those wishing to appear as "coming of a noble family" not only adopted, like the visitors in Auerbach's cellar, a "proud and discontented" mien, but also spread round themselves the sublime and sombre halo which surrounds the victim of melancholy. "Why so melancholy?" was the fashionable question if people wished to be particularly polite. In a contemporaneous play, *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (III, ii), a gentleman

<sup>1</sup> That Hamlet is to be conceived as a melancholy character has often been asserted by earlier Shakespearean scholars, one of the first being the Scottish critic Henry Mackenzie, in the *Mirror*, No. 99 (1780). An exhaustive scholarly discussion of this view has also been contributed by Löning in his work entitled *Shakespeares Hamlet-Tragödie*, Stuttgart, 1893. Since, however, the knowledge which English and American scholars have of German Shakespearean research rarely reaches farther than the extracts given in the Variorum edition of Furness, the same discovery has recently been made once more by Bradley in his excellent book, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, 1904. Neither Löning nor Bradley, however, have treated the problem from the purely literary point of view, i.e., cleared up its genetic connexions. Cf. on this point the author's article in the *Germ. Roman. Monatschr.*, iv, 1912, No. 6; E. E. Stoll, *Mod. Philology*, iii ("Shakespeare, Marston, and the Malcontent Type"); Bieber, *loc. cit.*; and Radebrecht, *Shakespeares Abhängigkeit von Marston* (Schücking and Deutschbein's "Neue Anglistische Arbeiten," No. 3, 1918).



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of rank changes places with his servant and asks him how he now feels. The answer is :

My nobility is wonderful melancholy. Is it not most gentlemanlike to be melancholy ?

This kind of jest is not unfrequent, especially in the comedy of manners of that period.

Among the serious melancholy types upon the stage we notice especially the melancholy lover, handed down by the literature of fiction, with certain conventional features which still preserved something of the rigidity of the Provençal theories of love in the twelfth century. The melancholy lover is in a kind of fever, alternately hot and cold, pale and flushed, consumed by impatience, full of fears and forebodings, sighing, weeping, uttering complaints in solitude which he sometimes puts into sentimental verses ; he is indifferent to all demands of social life and physical nature ; he can live without eating and sleeping ; all he needs is a little music and his private sorrow. The melancholy of love, however, is only a mood, a transitory state, which vanishes again together with its cause, and apparently is not supposed to be due to any particular natural tendency. Quite another thing is that melancholy which, though appearing only under the influence of certain proximate causes, rests on the firm ground of a clearly defined temperament. It is true that the manifestations of both kinds are in some respects very similar, but they are so only in appearance. The second type is evolved from the medieval doctrine of temperaments. Shakespeare's age had an idea of this type of temperament which is very strikingly differentiated. It is not at all impossible that the essential part of it is derived from the very play before us, viz., Kyd's *Urhamlet*. A little later an attempt is made to analyse its peculiar nature by Sir Thomas Overbury in his work entitled *Characters* (1614), which cleverly presents a number of various types of human individuals and professions. According to him the melancholy person is a whimsical fellow who goes his own ways, remote from other men. He takes a completely pessimistic view of the

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

world, and finds satisfaction only in continually spinning out his destructive and suicidal fancies. Strange visions haunt his mind. "He thinks business, but never does any ; he is all contemplation, no action." The neglect and disorder of his outward appearance agree with his mental disharmony. He is an enemy to sun and warmth, eats little, and sighs a lot.

In this portrait some features of the melancholy type stand out in bold relief, especially the unwholesome, diseased, and over-excited state of his mind, manifested in his distrust of and aversion to people, in his inability to concentrate himself, to get rid of tormenting ideas, to pull himself together. All this we should nowadays declare to be a sign of neurasthenia. What surprises us, however, is the fact that the Elizabethan author considers an unnaturally strong activity of the imagination to be an inseparable accompaniment of melancholy. "Straggling thoughts are his content, they make him dreame waking, there's his pleasure. His imagination is never idle, it keeps his mind in a continuall motion, as the poise the clocke : he winds up his thoughts often, and as often unwinds them ; Penelope's web thrives faster."

When we look for an incarnation of this type on the stage in the time previous to Hamlet, in addition to Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* we are particularly struck by the hero of Marston's revenge-tragedies, Antonio. With his sleeplessness, his many sighs and sudden outbursts of passionate complaints, his tardiness of action, his pessimistic reflections, his slight tendency to dissimulation, his high culture and intelligence, his excessive irritability, and his abrupt spasms of fury—things of which Overbury says nothing—he would remind us vividly of Hamlet even if he did not, like the latter, come upon the stage dressed in black garments and reading a book.

Still more striking in certain traits is the resemblance to the portrait drawn by Overbury on the one hand, and Hamlet on the other, of a certain melancholy figure which was probably meant to be a caricature—perhaps of the *Urhamlet*. This is young Lord Dowsecer in Chapman's

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

comedy, *A Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597), who is expressly designated as suffering from the 'humour' of melancholy. The King and his Court divert themselves with placing a few objects of everyday use in the way of this queer fellow, who is introduced as a highly cultured pessimist and misanthrope. He promptly takes up these things and, to the amusement of the listeners, makes them the subjects of a monologue and proceeds from them, just as Hamlet does from the skull, to pessimistic reflections, castigating the vanities, abuses, and annoyances of the world, and now and then demanding their abolition with a rhetorical gesture. Very characteristic are the aversion and disgust with which he refers to procreation and his exaggerated and almost ludicrous cynicism. His father says to him: "I wish thou wouldst confess to marry," and he answers:

To marry, father? why, we shall have children.

*Father.* Why, that's the end of marriage, and the joy of men.

*Dowsecer.* Oh, how you are deceived! You have but me, and what a trouble am I to your joy! But, father, if you long to have some fruit of me, see, father, I will creep into this stubborn earth and mix my flesh with it, and they shall breed grass, to fat oxen, asses, and such-like, and when they in the grass the spring converts into beasts' nourishment, then comes the fruit of this my body forth; then may you well say, seeing my race is so profitably increased, that good fat ox and that same large-eared ass are my son's sons, that calf with a white face is his fair daughter; with which, when your fields are richly filled, then will my race content you; but for the joys of children, tush, 'tis gone—children will not deserve, nor parents take it: wealth is the only father and the child, and but in wealth no man hath any joy.<sup>1</sup>

The additional traits we find in this figure of melancholy complete the representation of the type. Here also we note as characteristic features a high degree of education—he enters meditating on a quotation from Cicero (the

<sup>1</sup> Compare the similar remarks of Hamlet (II, iii): "How a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar."

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

melancholy man of Overbury likewise is given to intellectual pursuits)—a whimsical depreciation of and turning away from life, a kind of pessimism which in this case leads to occasional lapses into extreme philosophical materialism, but is also found combined with rigorous moral principles. The most significant traits, however, are, as elsewhere, the eternal persistence in the train of gloomy reflections on men and the world, fantastical ideas which that period considered such essential constituents of the melancholy nature that Ben Jonson once in an enumeration of the temperaments contrasts the slow-phlegmatic with the fantastic-melancholy. Moreover, though this character is to a certain extent a caricature, it is not regarded exclusively as comical, and it is very characteristic that the King, after listening to him, refuses to identify his behaviour with madness and prefers to speak of it as "a holy fury," even acknowledging that "he is more humane than all we are."

The same type, in a slightly different shape, turns up again in Shakespeare's Jaques in *As You Like It*, who actually styles himself a melancholy man. He loves solitude, is "compact of jars," as the Duke says of him, a pessimist, a wit, knows the ways of the world, and is an unfailing judge of its abuses, has a great power of self-criticism, an inclination to brooding and laziness, no interest in women, and a decided love of music. His vocation in life seems to be discovering bitter truths and cleverly formulating them. His character further resembles that of Dowsecer in being moved by a sense of critical superiority to attempt a reformation of the world. He says :

give me leave  
To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world.

II, vii

The examples adduced will suffice to enable us to recognize this type which, embodied in a variety of figures, but fundamentally unchanged, lives on in the dramatic literature of the time. Its most fascinating representative

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

is Hamlet. It is true that we have to distinguish in his character the mask from the original face. Hamlet, as we know, declares after the appearance of the ghost that he is going to take on "an antic disposition" (I, v), yet those scenes in which there is no necessity for the mask sufficiently inform us about his true nature.<sup>1</sup>

It is indeed impossible to throw Hamlet's character more strongly into relief than is done in the opening scenes. The very first words the King addresses to him in the First Quarto give us the decisive cue: "What means these sad and melancholy moods?" This remark directs the eyes of all the spectators toward him. They must, however, have been struck by his appearance before, because in the glittering and sumptuous assembly where the King, attended by his train, is giving audience Hamlet alone, among gorgeously dressed courtiers, wears an "inky cloak" and "solemn black." He has put it on as sign of mourning, but no one else is still in mourning, and therefore all the onlookers, from the boxes to the

<sup>1</sup> If we fix our attention on the manifestations of his character from the very beginning of the play, we shall be better able to recognize it than by investigating minutely what Hamlet was *before* the events related in the play. This point of view, which is taken, e.g., by Kuno Fischer, Bradley, etc., must be regarded as quite erroneous, if only for the reason that it always comes perilously near confounding art and reality. Only what has been present in the poet's consciousness can be adduced for the purpose of explaining artistic creations. In the case of an imagined figure we cannot speak of its past unless the poet himself does so. To attempt its reconstruction from the given facts is ridiculous. As well might we look under the frame of a picture for a continuation of the scene represented on the canvas. Hence it is amazing that even a great and serious critic like Dowden should think it worth while to reflect on the probability of Hamlet's having been influenced by the fact that during the reign of the strong-willed elder Hamlet his introspective son was not compelled to take an active part in affairs. This would be an ingenious inference in the case of a real person, but it is comical if we are dealing with a fictitious character, whose nature can obviously not be determined by such reflections, since it is conceived in the mind of its creator in the state demanded by the dramatic action. It is ridiculous of Kuno Fischer to maintain that "Claudius is elected king probably for economic reasons," and of Thümmel to connect the skull of Yorick, the jester, in the last act with the personality of the deceased King and assert that the warlike and ever active father of Hamlet had felt the need of creating a kind of artistic relief to the tragedy of life. This is to transfer the methods of historical research to the realm of fancy, which is subject to quite different laws. Critics like these resemble the farmer in the Drury Lane gallery who upon hearing Richard III cry out "a kingdom for a horse" offered him a two-year-old brown gelding: they confound appearance and reality.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

end of the pit, at once are sure that this is the "melancholy gentleman." The stage types of the time are each distinguished by a peculiar costume—the steward by his chain and velvet coat, the harlot by a glaring 'loose-bodied' satin gown, the king by a long beard and red robe, the fool by his motley, and so the melancholy gentleman also reveals himself by his dress and bearing. This first impression is not deceptive, because it is confirmed by what the spectators see and hear. Evidently he sits on his chair "with veiled lids," as his mother says, and bears in his expression, in his sighs and tears, as he himself informs us, "The trappings and the suits of woe." The somewhat snappy retort to his mother's question, "Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not 'seems,'" the surprisingly laconic answers, the outbreak of despair after the Court have retired: "O! that this too too solid flesh would melt . . .," which reveals a degree of pessimism, a disgust of the world, incapable of being surpassed, all confirm this impression. We see that he is in a condition reminding us of the neurasthenic type of Overbury. Horatio enters and accosts him: "Hail to your lordship," and he replies mechanically, absorbed in thought: "I am glad to see you well," then, recollecting himself and looking up, adds: "Horatio, or I do forget myself." "Speak to him," says Overbury of the melancholy man; "he hears with his eyes, eares follow his mind, and that's not at leysure." The idea of his father comes into his mind and instantly his irritated brain reacts so powerfully that he sees him standing before him: "My father—methinks I see my father," whereupon his friend, puzzled, but impressed by the apparition of the preceding night, asks him: "O where, my lord?" receiving the reassuring answer: "In my mind's eye, Horatio." All this takes place before the ghost has yet revealed to him his dreadful secret and laid upon him the arduous task.

The key to the figure of Hamlet is to be found at once in the impression of this first scene. Here we see yet another instance of Shakespeare's commonest technical device, which he applies more consistently than any other artistic process, viz., to give a clearly marked outline of

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the characters in the exposition and to make their first appearance more especially yield as much information as possible. The definition given by Overbury of this type of character and so faithfully followed by Shakespeare in this scene is observed throughout the rest of the play. In several passages the external symptoms of his condition, his sighs, his sleeplessness, his habit of walking up and down in solitude, are especially emphasized. It is interesting to note that Hippolito in Dekker's *Honest Whore*, after becoming melancholy, also paces restlessly up and down his room. ("He sups up a draught of as much aire at once as would serve at thrice," Overbury says; "he denies nature her due in sleep.") He complains of bad dreams. The actor that wishes to represent him properly ought therefore to adopt from the very beginning an air of being languid and exhausted by lack of sleep, exhibit a strong trait of morbidity, give clear signs of the inward unrest which makes him cross and recross his room, and put an expression into his eyes as though they were afraid of broad daylight, like those of the melancholy Vindici in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. If, then, we are asked to define the first principle of Hamlet's nature we must reply, disregarding entirely the apparent violence of his passion, that it is *weakness and irritability*. His abnormal irritability clearly appears on several occasions, especially in the scene at Ophelia's grave, where the fact of Laertes loudly lamenting his dead sister drives Hamlet into that "fit" for which he afterward apologizes to Horatio, pleading his inability to control himself ("His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy"). To this fit there are exact parallels in the cases of two other melancholy characters, Hieronimo and Marston's Antonio, who too are unable to bear the idea of another person daring to suffer more under misfortunes than themselves.<sup>1</sup> This irritability is also the cause of Hamlet's extraordinary *intolerance*, which he manifests, e.g., in his meetings with Polonius. If we require any further proof we may find it in Hamlet's self-characterization, in which he speaks twice (cf. p. 31) of this weakness, once plainly styling it

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Radebrecht, p. 71 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

his "weakness and melancholy," the other time characterizing himself as the counter-pole to Hercules.

Now the objection might be raised that weakness and irritability or a clearly defined temperament are not, properly speaking, the ultimate foundation of character. "Temperament," says Kuño Fischer (Hamlet, p. 79), "is the musical mode in which our feelings are expressed, but not the music itself; it is the rhythm of life, not its theme." It might seem that from the kind of description indicated above no conclusion can be reached as to whether character is noble or mean, whether a mind is well stored or poorly equipped, whether the reasoning faculty is keen or blunt. People have even gone so far as to see in the whole melancholy disposition of Hamlet merely a derivative quality proceeding as a necessary consequence from his wounded moral idealism, the strength of that emotion being only a symptom and measure of this deeper principle. This conclusion, however, must be challenged. Though we admit that the outbreak of Hamlet's melancholy is evidently caused by his great disappointment at the marriage of his mother, yet we maintain that this circumstance might have affected another kind of character, possessing maybe as much or even more moral idealism, quite differently. It is a well-known fact that the extent and degree of the reaction is determined by the emotional susceptibility, not by the moral idealism. Now Hamlet possesses this emotional susceptibility and irritability in a highly morbid degree. Moreover, if Shakespeare had seen in the fact that Hamlet allows his constitution to be so utterly ruined by his sad emotional experiences a sign of a particularly noble disposition he would assuredly have put this idea into the mouth of some other person. In reality, however, he holds precisely the opposite view; he is an unreserved advocate of resistance against the evils of life, and therefore sees the greatest merit in not allowing, to use his own expressions, the "judgment" to be overcome by the "blood."

Now if the Elizabethan spectator regarded Hamlet as a "melancholy man," i.e., as an *imaginative, brooding*



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

*intellectualist with morbid traits*, we can see how explanations that assign an undue weight to accidental phenomena must necessarily co-operate with distortions of the text in order to achieve their end. The melancholy type, as we have seen already in Overbury, is incapable of any concentrated systematic activity. Hamlet too is unable to pursue a plan. The melancholy person always sinks back into his reverie and must be pushed from without. This is true, e.g., of Hieronimo, the avenger in *The Spanish Tragedy*, an early specimen of the type, who, despite the tremendous passion of revenge that devours him, must in the end receive an energetic impulse from Bellimperia, in order to achieve his purpose. But the melancholy person is not in the least afraid of bloodshed, and does not shrink from murder as being in itself a frightful deed. Here comes in the error of a great many critics, who conceive Hamlet as having far too delicate a mental organization to be capable of committing murder in pursuance of a revenge demanded of him. In ever new forms this explanation of Hamlet is brought forward, which in many respects might appear as the most natural solution of the problem. The reader sympathizes with Hamlet and says to himself: Here is a delicately constituted creature of brain and nerves, with modern ways of thinking and feeling, just like yourself, in the midst of people whom he has left far behind in respect of mental development. Would you not, in his position, act precisely as he does? This conception, which is fundamentally wrong, is founded upon certain traits which are especially apparent at the beginning. There can be no doubt that Shakespeare refined and ennobled the feelings of his hero in many directions in an unprecedented manner, though leaving intact his fundamental character. In many passages he represents him as imbued with the spirit of purest humanity. His words about his dead father are full of that piteous tenderness which tell of a wound still unhealed—we must remember that Shakespeare's father had died in the year which saw the production of *Hamlet*—they breathe the aspiration of a noble heart to offer the deceased in his

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

thoughts a kind of compensation, by means of his passionate admiration, for the wrong done to his memory by the indifference of his widow and the speedy forgetfulness of the others. A most distinguished and sympathetic trait is the way in which the innermost depths of his soul are cruelly affected by this purely spiritual and unselfish disappointment. A fine manly friendship, setting aside all considerations of rank, unites him to Horatio, whom he entreats to style himself not his servant but his friend—a genuine affection like that entertained by Schiller's young Don Carlos for his beloved Posa. How hearty and courteous is his first reception of his old companions, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; how noble and truly generous his acknowledgment of the good qualities possessed by Laertes, his enemy; how strongly pronounced is his preference for what is simple and natural, and his dislike, even his hatred, of affectation and pretence!

All these are beautiful traits, unmistakable signs of rare humanity and exquisite tact; hence they have been taken as revealing the poet's own personality. His behaviour toward Ophelia and Polonius, however, shows no trace of them. The cause of this contradiction is not to be sought in the conflict between the character and the action. Rümelin's idea is that the same Hamlet in whom Shakespeare has put so much of himself is no longer fit to be the hero of the Northern legend, the bloody avenger and fivefold murderer. He thinks that Shakespeare ought to have remoulded the material and given the theme a more humane and symbolic aspect, as Goethe did in his *Iphigenie*. By making, says Rümelin, this man of delicate feeling, who is so sensitive to the moral deficiencies of others and the depravity of the world, able to kill, incidentally as it were, three innocent people and then behave as if nothing had happened, he produces an impression upon us comparable to that which we should receive if Goethe's *Iphigenie* in an *entr'acte* were to immolate a number of captives on the altar of Diana, whose priestess she is. In this criticism there is a certain amount of truth, but it misses the fact that Hamlet—at least in the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

condition in which we see him—is just as little the male ideal of the Elizabethan Age as he is that of our modern times.

Some momentary flashes of irony and cynicism, certain harsh and cutting remarks (“We shall obey, were she ten times our mother,” III, ii), his occasional manifestations of a certain malignity, a pleasure in unmasking evildoers, which especially appears in his fierce joy at the self-betrayal of the King, may be explained as a reaction against the tremendous emotional tension, which finds relief in this way. Very likely, however, this interpretation would be wrong, for other melancholy personalities also, in quite different situations, show the same trait, which is closely connected with their morbid weakness, though Hamlet alone vents his excitement in that hilarity which is demanded by the peculiar exigencies of the situation. A good actor ought strongly to emphasize this trait.

The neurotic condition of Hamlet should never be lost sight of. It is not necessary to make him express it by such external means as, according to a trustworthy description, were once employed by Sarah Bernhardt in Berlin. In the play-scene she climbed up the balustrade behind which the royal murderer was sitting with his consort and “grinned in his face with distorted features like a malignant ape showing his teeth.” The fundamental idea, however, of her rendering, viz., to represent Hamlet as a man suffering from nervous disorder and being haunted by hallucinations, doubtless rests on a sound historical basis. The diseased quality of this nature is best expressed by the actor alternating between the one extreme of morbid self-absorption and the other of absolutely unrestrained exaltation.

His incredibly excited manner is described by Queen Gertrude in the First Quarto, where she says of his behaviour in the interview which leads to the killing of Polonius, “He throws and tosses me about.” Further, a curious passage in a contemporaneous poem written about a person who has been made half mad by love runs as follows :

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Puts off his cloathes, his shirt he onely wears,  
Much like mad Hamlet,

thus giving some idea of the remarkably odd way in which the character was at that time represented !<sup>1</sup>

Only by keeping all this in mind shall we be able to comprehend Hamlet's treatment of the body of Polonius. It again shows the morbid traits, purposely elaborated, of the melancholy character who, according to the opinion of the period (as we find also in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*), may occasionally create the impression of being morally irresponsible. The same morbidity of mind is shown in his behaviour toward his mother. These things, *i.e.*, Hamlet's luxuriating in the minute description of the sexual relations between his mother and his stepfather, the warning he gives her not to

Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed ;  
Pinch wanton on your cheek . . .

are either passed over by critics of Hamlet in silence as unfit for treatment, or made the pivot of the whole problem. Both conceptions are equally wrong. The indulging in erotic imaginations and the interest taken in procreation and the peculiar qualities of women, due to a feeling of disgust, are regular traits of the melancholy character. We find this note sounded already in the case of young Lord Dowsecer, and again and again it enters as a component part, in the most varied forms, into the delineation of melancholy. As late as 1603, in Marston's *Malcontent*, the further development of the type, we have in the central figure this preoccupation with immorality and similar furious attacks delivered upon it.

The melancholy character, feeding his discontent with constant brooding and proudly fond of his loneliness, inevitably develops into a censor of morals, a function which he can, of course, exercise only if he takes a high ethical standpoint. It is true, no doubt, that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the poem in Munro, *Shakespeare Allusion Book*, London, 1909, p. 133. It is interesting to note that King Lear too when overwhelmed by madness begins to throw off his clothes.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

melancholy character's moral censure was not taken quite seriously by his age ; his utterances appeared to some as extravagant,<sup>1</sup> and were certainly received with laughter by the ordinary Elizabethan audience, which never took a very advanced view of ethical questions. In all these things the moral standards have become very much changed during the last few centuries, so that the statements made then no longer appear in quite the same light. We can therefore apply to many of Hamlet's sayings Shakespeare's own word : " This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof." Fortunately for the work of exposition, Hamlet by his utterances gives plenty of unmistakable proofs of his melancholy ; but such pessimistic opinions as that the world " is an unweeded garden that grows to seed " were also, we may be sure, taken merely as expressions of an almost insane mind by a period which was firmly convinced that everything is most excellently arranged by a wise providence. Such sayings are estimated like the famous passage in *Lea* :

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,  
They kill us for their sport, IV, i, 36

and like the wonderful words about the nature of life spoken by Macbeth after his breakdown :

It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing. V, v, 26

It remained for a later century to construct a philosophy on the foundation of pessimism, and then, of course, the

<sup>1</sup> When Lord Dowsecer, speaking of the usual relation between men and women, indignantly says,

" But to admire them as our gallants do,  
' Oh, what an eye she hath ! O ! dainty hand,  
Rare foot and leg ! ' and leave the mind respectless,  
This is a plague that in both men and women  
Makes such pollution of our earthly being . . . "

one may be in doubt whether the author is quite serious. When, however, the hero finds a sword laid in his way and angrily exclaims : " . . . as if there were not ways enough to die by natural and casual accidents, diseases, surfeits, brave carouses, old aqua-vitæ, and too base wives, and thousands more : hence with this art of murder ! " the audience certainly received these ' pacifist ' utterances with laughter.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

expression of melancholy was taken much more seriously than by the period to which it was addressed.

But let the matter rest there. The development of these sides of the melancholy character has enabled the poet to lay on some especially effective colours, to show the great moral pathos of the hero in his aversion to hypocrisy and his striving for truth, and to reveal his strong satirical vein. Yet it has also caused the whole problem of the play to be regarded from a wrong point of view, and undue prominence to be given to the intellectual and theoretical aspect of Hamlet's outbreaks of feeling. By critics of this school Hamlet is said to possess sufficient energy and "physical strength" for action (Goethe), but to be too much occupied with the breakdown of his ethical idealism. He is represented as little interested in, or not much moved by, the individual, because he is a genius, *i.e.*, a perfectly 'objective' character who is passing through the great crisis of his mind and must first find his way again in the world, which sounds more like Dostoevski than Shakespeare! (Türck). Hamlet is regarded as paralysed by the conflict between his desire for revenge and a *Weltschmerz* produced by disgust of the world on the one hand, and, on the other, a disposition inimical to the world and to life (Kuno Fischer). Such critics put the consequents before the antecedents, the effects before the causes. If they had referred to the companion drama of *Hamlet*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, with its almost identical problem, they would have perceived that to the Elizabethan poet the attitude of an avenger who despite an absence of sufficient external obstacles fails to accomplish his end depends neither on his genius (Türck) nor on his philosophy. Though the pessimism of old Hieronimo is not nearly so intense as that of Hamlet, his power of action is not, therefore, shown to be any stronger.

The point of departure for the explanation of Hamlet, we must again insist, lies in the morbid weakness of will of the melancholy character. How great a prominence is to be given to it is best seen in the contrast between him

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

and Laertes. The latter is conceived as a counter-player to Hamlet. A counter-player is a dramatic figure that solves similar problems by different means. Hamlet himself—and once more Shakespeare's art is seen to be an *explicit* art—draws attention to this contrast (V, ii) when he says :

By the image of my cause, I see  
The portraiture of his.

His energy in avenging his father forms the most effective contrast to the irresolution of the Prince. This contrast Shakespeare, true to his general habit of showing at once in the introduction the foundations on which the whole dramatic edifice is constructed, prepares and indicates in the very first scenes of the play. The drama begins by Laertes energetically insisting on having his will and carrying his point, whereas the Prince easily yields to persuasion and gives up the wish he had already expressed of returning to Wittenberg. Apparently a similar contrast already existed in the *Urhamlet*, and it is accentuated by the fact that the jolly and active young fellow is attracted by Paris, where one can enjoy life, where is to be found the home of fashion and the atmosphere of the great world, while the brooding and introspective student desires to attend the seat of learning, the German university of Wittenberg. This trait is quite in keeping with the general melancholy type in the drama, for Hieronimo, Antonio, Dowsecer, and Jaques agree with Hamlet in possessing a certain amount of learning, either a critical knowledge of books or an impersonal interest in science. His period regarded the poet-scholar as the ideal of a certain social class, and had a general tendency to bring art and science into an intimate relation. That is why he too has strongly developed artistic leanings, writes poetry, has a knowledge of theatrical matters, plays the flute, and is fond of music, these being accomplishments in which the Shakespearean man of action is deficient. All this rich mental life, however, is unable to provide him with motives for action. With the weapons of the weak, irony and scorn, he opposes

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

the hostile world which contains no secrets his keen intellect cannot penetrate. Where his rival uses brute force he eludes his adversaries by means of clever equivocations, though, with the profound self-knowledge which distinguishes him, he cannot but be bitterly sensible that this conduct, at bottom so unworthy, is a moral blemish.

His actions—whenever he goes so far as to act—are only seemingly inconsistent with this weakness. A certain harmony of character and action was in all likelihood present already in Kyd's play, with this difference, possibly, that greater stress may have been laid on the external obstacles. *Fratricide Punished* gives evidence of this. Though the Prince in that play assumes the mask of madness in order to have a better chance of getting near the well-guarded King, we are not meant to conclude that he was incapable of action. In the case of Hamlet this motive is wanting. As no reason is stated for his dissimulation, it has been traced back exclusively to subjective motives. Bradley—who in this case as in others is essentially in agreement with the rest of the critics—sees in Hamlet's attempt to disguise himself an instinct of self-protection, a feeling that this mask will relieve him of the fearful burden that threatens to crush his heart and brain. Only Stoll objects to this view as far too speculative (p. 269). As a matter of fact, we cannot well comprehend why that which in Kyd's drama so clearly appears, upon reference to the original (*cf.* p. 149), as a blunder must be interpreted as a clever piece of psychological analysis in the case of Shakespeare. The true explanation is that Shakespeare, here as in other instances, after fixing upon the plot as a whole, takes over the inherent faults into the bargain without examining them too closely.

Equally wrong, no doubt, is the endeavour to find special motives, never openly expressed, for Hamlet's behaviour toward Ophelia ("Get thee to a nunnery"), and Stoll is perfectly right in objecting to the view that Hamlet's bitterness against women is meant to reflect his personal disappointment because of his experiences with Ophelia and his mother. We have seen that declamations against



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

women belong to that 'humour' or that aversion to life which is part of the melancholy character, and therefore they continually recur in the representations of the type.<sup>1</sup>

It has already been mentioned that Hamlet in Kyd's drama (according to the evidence furnished by *Fratricide Punished*) is some degrees more energetic, full at any rate of a passionate hatred of the King, and is not represented as such a creature of brain and nerves as in Shakespeare's play. Therefore we may suppose that the great turning-point of the piece, the prayer scene and Hamlet's renunciation of revenge in it, was not exactly improbable either, though, perhaps, never quite unexceptionable. Shakespeare took it over without giving it any new interpretation (*cf.* below). The decisive actions which Hamlet performs there, the killing of Polonius, the boarding of the pirate ship, the dispatch of the King in the duel scene, are all measures that do not necessarily conflict with the character itself. Hamlet is not cowardly, but weak. Even the weak man may pull himself together in order to act when he gets excited. The excitement makes him strong for a moment only. This happens to Hamlet at the very beginning of the play (I, iv), when the appearance of the ghost puts him into such a state that the faithful Horatio exclaims, quite terrified, "He waxes desperate with imagination," for at just that moment the Prince feels himself so strong that "each petty artery in this body [is] as hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve." The unnatural state is then, of necessity, displaced by the corresponding prostration. The other heroes of Shakespeare who suffer from weakness of will are not much different in this respect. A very similar case is presented, for instance, by Richard II; none of Shakespeare's characters exhibits a greater lack of will-power. He too finds that the task of defending his crown which has been laid upon him, even though not announced to him by any ghost, exceeds his power of action; he folds his hands resignedly and consumes what

<sup>1</sup> Here we might also instance Dowsecer, who speaks in a very similar manner without any personal experience (*cf.* p. 156), also Malevole in *The Malcontent*, it being of little moment in this connexion that this play was written *after Hamlet*, not, as Stoll thinks, before. *Cf.* Radebrecht, p. 79 *seq.*

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

strength of will he has in pessimistic reflections. He allows himself to be thrust from his throne and cast into prison. But he resembles Hamlet in having sudden bursts of passionate energy, which in his case appear especially in moments of personal danger (V, iv), and he sells his life dearly.

Shakespeare found in the figure of the *Urhamlet*, which is proved by the cognate principal character of *The Spanish Tragedy* to have possessed a far more diversified and fascinating physiognomy than is commonly assumed, a splendid model for his art of dramatic refinement. As regards the rest of the characters, however, he received from his predecessor an inheritance which was not in every respect satisfactory. It is part of the principle of the drama that on the one hand the characters must not possess any conspicuous quality that does not influence the action, and on the other hand the action must not depend on qualities which do not appear in the course of the drama. His strict observance, in the vast majority of cases, of the first rule is one of Shakespeare's chief merits. An exception is the curious melancholy of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, which at the beginning of the play completely dominates him. The question may be asked whether in an earlier play, which Shakespeare drew upon, this quality made Antonio too careless and passive against the Jew, so that he was guilty of facilitating the game of his dangerous foe. Whatever may be the case in that play, in Hamlet we have another exception not dissimilar, in a dramatic respect, to the one just mentioned, in the madness of Ophelia. The origin of this trait may perhaps be explained in the way already indicated, viz., that in an older play a mad girl appeared whose madness was used to set the stone rolling and disentangle the complication. Under the influence of her madness she roams through the woods and enters a cave, where she finds traces of a murder which serve to show up the intrigue of the play. No such dramatic purpose is intended by the madness of Ophelia. It is important for the action only inasmuch as it indirectly brings about the scene at the grave, and it]is

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

open to doubt whether this scene justifies such a dramatic development of the original conception of Ophelia's character. In dealing with the problem in this manner, however, we run the danger of confining Shakespeare to the Procrustean bed of prescribed formulæ. It is perfectly evident that qualities of character which have no bearing upon the action are avoided by the dramatist, especially for the reason that they excite an interest and call forth expectations which are afterward not fulfilled by any dramatic developments, but vanish without leaving a trace. The figure of Ophelia, however, is of such a peculiar kind that it cannot give rise to any such expectations. It is a beautiful dramatic luxury which sets at defiance the artistic principle so often repeated in modern times, that all superfluous details in art are to be avoided as detrimental.

As regards the second part of the above-mentioned rule—namely, that the action must not be dependent on qualities which are not shown by the respective persons in the course of the drama—Shakespeare's practice is quite different. It is obvious that this eventuality can arise only where decisive incidents are assumed to have happened before the beginning of the drama. This is the case in *Hamlet*. A dreadful crime has been committed, presupposing a character such as can be found only among the outcasts of humanity. A trustful, unsuspecting brother has been assassinated; the man who has blackened his soul with this enormous guilt must manifest a nature to correspond with it. We expect his malevolence and baseness to appear in his character. The qualities which make him a murderer should come out clearly in his relation to his environment even after he has attained his object. In this figure, however, we notice a conflict between dramatic appearance and reality similar to that which some critics have tried to find in Julius Cæsar. The objection urged against Julius Cæsar, that his character is assumed to be quite different from what it appears to our eyes in his actions, unquestionably holds good in the case of Claudius, his behaviour not corresponding in the least with what we hear of him. The events supposed to have

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

occurred before the beginning of the action reveal him as an almost incredible criminal. The ghost of the murdered King speaks of him as one "whose natural gifts were poor to those of mine." Hamlet's descriptions make him out a cunning voluptuary, a "vice of kings," "a king of shreds and patches." According to this information we should expect to find him a vile sneak, a scoundrel anxiously and suspiciously watching over the crown he has stolen, at the very least a man whom the great lie on which he has built his very existence as king has given an uneasy or an artificial air. All the more surprised are we, when first making his acquaintance in the great state scene (I, ii), by the most princely deportment with which he discharges the duties of his royal office. In a magnificent, well-ordered speech from the throne, which is as distinguished for the greatness of the thoughts as it is manly, even majestic, in tone, he treats of the affairs of the state and his own with complete assurance and apparently with a perfectly clear conscience. Not the slightest note of insincerity arrests our attention, no reluctance to mention his murdered brother's name can arouse the faintest suspicion. Politically, he is more than equal to his task; with the greatest energy he takes the measures which are necessary in view of the Norwegian danger; then with bland condescension which befits especially his position as a king but lately crowned he turns to the affairs of those immediately attendant upon him. Here also he shows intelligence and tact. All this, if we are to believe the critics (*cf.* Löning, p. 287), is but pretence and hypocrisy. This view, however, rests on a naïve inability to distinguish between art and reality. It is certain that in reality all he says would necessarily be false, but in the drama hypocrisy would also *have to betray itself* in some form or other. Now Shakespeare has made no efforts whatever to express this hypocrisy. Attempts to discover the King's character behind his words spring merely from the most subjective imagination. No tender stepfather could express himself more appropriately than he does. He addresses Hamlet with evident warmth of heart, and does not

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

lose his composure when he receives equivocal, scornful, and snappy answers. On the contrary, he opens his remarks in the superior manner of a benevolent elder brother ; he acknowledges that Hamlet's profound sorrow at the loss of his father does him honour (I, ii, 87) ; then, however, he uses strong but not unjust words in order to reprimand him for the excess of his grief, his morbid indulgence in it, and asks him to moderate himself. He is not insensible of the change in Hamlet's outward position which has been produced by the death of his father. It seems as if he tactfully avoids mentioning expressly that Hamlet's depression, in his opinion, is partly due to this cause. In terms as loving and considerate as only a devoted stepfather could find, he assures Hamlet that he will not fail him. Hamlet has probably been sitting turned away and apathetic during the whole of this long speech ; now his mother adds a few words—two lines—to those of her husband, and the Prince answers, without taking the slightest notice of his stepfather, in a single laconic sentence, which he very ostensibly addresses to his mother : " I shall in all my best obey you, madam." Again the King pretends not to notice Hamlet's hostility toward himself, and heartily expresses his joy at Hamlet's resolution to give up his journey to Wittenberg. He then shows a new side of his apparently most amiable character in promising a great banquet and openly avowing how much he himself is looking forward to this pleasure. Nobody would recognize in the behaviour of this clear-sighted, intelligent, dignified, and tactful prince the malignant villain and degenerate assassin. The only thing an actor could do in order to make the audience begin to suspect his character already in this scene would be to lay stress on this amiability. Wherever the occasion is suitable, *e.g.*, when the King encourages Laertes to make his request in the words

What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,  
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking ?

and also when he addresses Hamlet, his tone ought to be

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

one of insinuating and cloying sweetness, and we may assume that the Elizabethan actor from the first interpreted the part on these lines. It is this very same trait to which Hamlet refers in the reflection: "That one may smile and smile and be a villain." Evidently the purpose is to arouse suspicion by this excessive graciousness, this almost officious behaviour, of the King. That this feeling is not immediately aroused in us is due to our modern mentality. An English national peculiarity, it is true, even to-day compels the self-respecting man carefully to guard his 'dignity' and forbids him to show too much amiability. Shakespeare can conceive of no greater expression of contempt than the reproach made to Henry IV that he had "smiled his way up to the throne." Be this as it may, we do not, by the emphasizing of this trait either at the beginning or afterward, gain that immediate impression of the crowned criminal which we ought to receive according to the story. It is true that the treacherous way in which he attempts to rid himself of Hamlet, and especially the villainous instigation of Laertes, establishes a certain harmony between his character and the account of his previous deeds, though here he is acting in self-defence. What ill agrees with this conception, however, is his great loving tenderness toward his wife. Of her he says :

She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,  
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,  
I could not but by her.

IV, vii

This assassin is not only one of the most tender husbands Shakespeare has drawn, but also a true altruist in his sympathy for an unfortunate girl like Ophelia, and a hero who claims our admiration by his intrepidity in dangerous moments, as when Laertes raises a mutiny. Against all this evidence we are asked to believe that the theatrical performance arranged by Hamlet has so stirred up the King's conscience that the whole moral depravity of his behaviour comes home to him (III, iii) and causes him

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to reflect on the "blackness of his bosom," to make to himself what we may call a full confession of his guilt :

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven ;  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't ;  
A brother's murder !

This is not very convincing. However much the qualities of this figure during and before the action may conflict, it is certain that we are presented with an extremely energetic and intelligent man upon whom the theatrical performance could hardly have this effect. Only quite unstable or broken characters would under such circumstances, at such moments, plunge into prayer for the purpose of remorseful self-contemplation. Here also the primitive psychology of the model has been uncritically taken over. We see how Shakespeare with great equanimity works out what is demanded by the plan already contained in the story. A further consideration is that the action could not dispense with the prayer scene, inasmuch as it is the only means of giving the spectator the final confirmation, which is urgently required, that the events related by the ghost have actually taken place in the manner described. There is still another point of view from which Shakespeare may have regarded this scene : his purpose throughout his work is to make his villains recognize the culpable nature of their actions, and this is done in the King's monologue. We thus come to the conclusion that the parts of this figure are not all of one cast, but *are formed in accordance with the part each one has to take in the action*. Shakespeare here evidently worked, as Grillparzer says, "step by step," and each single part manifests the tendency, which was fully described before (p. 111), toward independence of the scene and heightening of the scenic effect.

6. ACTION ADJUSTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER (LEAR).—Though Shakespeare usually to a surprising degree adapts himself to the given action, we yet see in a few instances that he departs from the course prescribed by it. The most remarkable case of this kind is *King Lear*. It is true that here the playwright found a story

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

which was of very doubtful value as a dramatic plot, a king who makes the division of his realm among his children depend on the magniloquence of their protestations of love—the idea strikes one as though it had been invented by the author of *The Playboy of the Western World*, and can, indeed, have arisen only in a nation which is inclined to be intoxicated by fine and well-set phrases.<sup>1</sup> The various versions and arrangements of this theme in existence before Shakespeare's time had not attempted to render the subsequent course of the action psychologically consistent with the initial situation. Everywhere the King is treated cruelly by the daughters he has preferred, until he flees, degraded to the condition of a beggar, to the daughter who had been disowned by him, but who wins back his kingdom for him and puts him on the throne again. The strangeness of the introductory action compelled the dramatist either to provide different motives for the issue of the conflict, or to adjust the subsequent course of the action to the first part of it. The author of the older play of *King Lear*, which was hardly used by Shakespeare, adopted the former alternative, Shakespeare the latter. Many details of this perplexing tangle of vicissitudes may have suited his mood at the time. It was that period of his creative activity when his aim was to represent the overthrow of a great nature brought about by a certain blindness to things which to the common sense of the average mind cannot appear for a moment otherwise than in their true aspect. In this way, for example, his Othello works his own ruin and his infatuated Antony runs his head against the wall.

Not only in the world of the poet's own thoughts do we find figures closely related to King Lear. The suggestions to which this character is due, at least in its most comprehensive outlines, came to him from the works of other poets, a very common occurrence with him, as we know. The old man who goes mad with continual fretting had

<sup>1</sup> The story is first related by the Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth in the *Historia Reg. Brit.*, c. 1136. The name of Lear is Celtic, the subject possibly Irish. Cf. Rhys in Craig's edition, p. xxxv seq.



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

already fascinated the public in the guise of Kyd's old marshal Hieronimo, and to a lesser degree in that of Titus Andronicus. Furthermore, it is evident that immediately before the creation of Lear the author's mind had stamped upon it the image of another strong-willed old man who believes himself superior to his whole environment, and then, struck by Fate just where he is most vulnerable, knows no limit to his rage, kicks against the pricks, and is driven into madness by his futile resistance to his destiny. This is the Atheist in Tourneur's drama.<sup>1</sup>

The decisive impression, however, of his figure of Lear Shakespeare had received from the story itself. There the behaviour of the King, especially in the initial action, shows an extraordinary irascibility. On this fundamental trait Shakespeare based the whole character. Only a short, though important, passage is devoted to giving reasons for Lear's behaviour, the device employed being the reflection of his character in the minds of Goneril and Regan. We learn that he was hot-headed, "the best and soundest of his time hath been but rash," that "he hath ever but slenderly known himself," but that now age has weakened still further his "poor judgment" and makes • his choleric disposition break out in "inconstant starts." Though this review of the situation is given by the two wicked sisters, yet the poet's technique (*cf.* p. 66 *seq.*) leaves no doubt that it is to be taken as substantially correct. Still, this is not much; we are not given more than a hint, which is not sufficient to explain the much disputed introductory action. Here the question as to the relation of character and action once more becomes very acute. The critics, indeed, hold divergent views. Rümelin (p. 60) designates the whole scene as absurd, saying that the introduction is good enough for a fairy-tale but not for a soul-stirring tragedy. A renowned old King, he thinks, ought long to have known the disposition of his children, and could not deprive a beloved daughter of her inheritance merely because her simple words did not come up to the

<sup>1</sup> *Cf.* the author's essay "Eine Anleihe Shakespeares bei Tourneur," *Englische Studien*, vol. 1, p. 80 *seq.*

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

exaggerations of her sisters. Who acts thus, in Rümelin's opinion, has not much reason to lose and is probably not quite responsible from the very beginning. Kreyssig (ii, p. 113) also thinks little of the scene. According to him the first words of the King are those of a man who has 'a screw loose.' Brandes, who in important questions mostly follows Kreyssig, also considers (p. 642) the action as absolutely contrary to reason, and possible only in the world of fairy-tales. Others, however, have thought it necessary to defend Shakespeare. Thus, for instance, Vischer (iii, p. 286 *seq.*) thinks he can invalidate Rümelin's objections by saying that this critic cannot get away from a purely realistic conception of the events of the play. His own view is that the introductory action should be taken more symbolically, and that it only condenses into a short space of time what in reality was spread over many years. The King's yearning for tenderness, Cordelia's shy reluctance to show her love, the adroit utilization of the father's weakness by the other daughters, according to this critic presuppose a fairly long time without which they could not bring about the King's final resolve to disinherit Cordelia. Vischer concludes, therefore, that the poet wished to create a symbolical scene by concentrating all these actions into one dramatic moment.

This explanation, however, is untenable because it distorts the facts—a practice which makes so much symbolical interpretation of an art which is essentially realistic appear extremely doubtful. It would be scarcely possible, for instance, to explain the famous scene between Richard III and Anne in which he woos the widow of his victim at the very bier of her husband by the theory that it is not so much to be taken in a literal sense as to be considered the first beginning of a new love affair that springs up beside the corpse of the victim. This would be taking away the whole point of the scene. It is much the same in the case of Lear. The very suddenness of the resolution is the decisive point. Vischer's idea is a psychological process of an altogether different kind. Shakespeare did not dream of making Cordelia's reserve and coyness the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

cause of a slow estrangement between herself and her father. Had he wished to express this he could have made Lear designate his action as a kind of final test to which he intended to put her. We know, however, that on the contrary Lear is so full of tender love for Cordelia until the moment when she opens her mouth to utter the fatal words that he markedly prefers her to the other sisters.

In this manner, therefore, it is impossible to solve the difficulties described above, and Vischer's confident assertion that Schiller and Goethe would certainly have pronounced the piece to have a wonderful exposition could not count on finding much credence, even if there did not exist a statement made by Goethe, as unfortunately there does, to the effect that the exposition is simply absurd. The question must also be raised whether Bradley (p. 249) has really mastered these difficulties, which he probably underestimates (p. 71), in considering the opening scene as *not at all incredible* and describing the marriage of Othello, the Moor, and Desdemona, the daughter of the Venetian senator, as not less strange. He finds a good reason for Lear's behaviour in the "unfortunate speech" of Cordelia, who, he thinks, is not quite aware that saying less than the truth may also be equivalent to *not* telling it, and who is also partly to blame for the consequences on account of the disappointment and disgrace she has caused her father at the great moment he had so carefully planned. To this view we must object that it misjudges the problem. Nobody will dispute that the thwarting of his most eccentric plan by Cordelia was apt to put her father out of humour, even to anger him, but that it should change his love for his daughter to savage hate would be inconceivable, even if his love for Cordelia had been on a par with that which he felt for his other daughters. The fact that she is his darling, however, shows that he is well aware of her superior worth. How is it possible, then, that this knowledge could be extinguished by a single outburst of ill-humour and be replaced by the most senseless misconception of her character? Bradley replies: The King has a long life

180

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS


of absolute power behind him, in which he has been flattered to an almost incredible extent ; as a consequence, an arrogant self-will has been bred in him, the slightest opposition to which makes him fly into a passion. But a domineering spirit and an excessive vanity need not necessarily destroy all power of judgment. For the rest, the dragging in of previous events (*cf.* above, p. 158 *n.*) not mentioned by the poet is always a most questionable undertaking. Besides, all those critics who are so fond of depicting a reign of the King which was filled with flattery seem entirely to forget the fool and the good Kent, no less than the honest Gloster.

The problem cannot be solved in this way. What we have to decide is rather *whether the behaviour of the King toward his daughter can be brought into agreement, not with the laws of reason, but with the rest of his conduct.* The question whether this behaviour itself is reasonable or lunatic, whether the assumption of madness might eventually be detrimental to the tragic effect, etc., may in the meantime be left out of consideration altogether.

Now it is impossible to overlook the fact that Shakespeare has certainly tried very carefully to bring about an agreement between the behaviour of Lear in the introductory scene and the subsequent part of the action. The first indication of this endeavour is found in the conversation of the sisters, who report what we are told again later on,<sup>1</sup> that the abnormal excitement and exaltation is now beginning to be much more noticeable in his behaviour than before. Then in the banishment of the faithful Kent we witness a further instance of this change, which is hardly less remarkable than the preceding incident had been. In both he is equally immoderate. He is not satisfied with banishing Kent, but must, in addition, threaten him with capital punishment. He does not merely withdraw his favour from Cordelia, but immediately goes so far as to treat her like the scum of the earth ; the "barbarous Scythian" is as dear to him as she, and he spitefully

<sup>1</sup> "These dispositions, which of late transport you  
From what you rightly are." I, iv, 242

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

designates her as "new adopted to our hate." This attack is not followed by any return to a saner attitude. 

The same traits are manifested by Lear when, after his abdication, he is living on the charity of others. His impatience, lack of self-control, capriciousness, and arrogance remain unchanged. When the fool fails to respond to a sign given by him he reviles the whole world for being asleep. To the remarks made by the faithful fool he repeatedly replies by threatening him with a whip. When Kent, in disguise, applies to him in order to re-join his service, unknown to him, he uses such language as a policeman might use to a burglar, and then promises magnanimously to take him into his service if, after he has dined, he finds that he still likes him. Such being his treatment of his faithful followers, he naturally behaves with still greater rudeness toward those who provoke him. He strikes Goneril's gentleman-in-waiting, he insults the negligent steward with the words, "You whoreson dog! you slave! you cur!" and is delighted when Kent trips the fellow up and throws him to the ground. Thereupon, when Goneril dares to remonstrate with him, certainly not out of any feeling of kindness, but at least provisionally observing the forms of outward politeness, he considers himself highly offended in his dignity even by this slight rebuke, and breaks out in a paroxysm of fury that makes him weep with rage and hurl a veritable flood of execrations at his daughter, cursing not only herself as a degenerate bastard, but the very child in her womb (I, iv, 295). Not satisfied with having given the most unsparing expression to his indignation, he adds scorn to insult by asking the woman who has offended him: "Your name, fair gentlewoman?" The same love of theatrical ostentation is shown later in the scene with Regan (II, iii), when in order to heighten the effect of his bitter words he kneels down, by way of trial, as he says. (This is a most ingenious and successful way of following up the theatrical idea which had induced Lear to arrange the opening scene.) Then, after Regan has finally disillusioned him, he is seized and shaken in every limb by such a fit of frenzy that even he

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

perceives himself to be struggling with a malady, and makes violent efforts to free himself from the "hysterica passio" (a term frequently used in that time to designate cramp in the stomach). The enormous excitement of the ensuing scenes, in which he is degraded to the condition of a beggar, throws his reason completely out of gear.

Every one of these actions shows a remarkable lack of moderation, just as his behaviour to Kent and his undiminished confidence in Regan despite his experiences with Goneril betray, to put it mildly, a total lack of judgment, and both of these qualities are in perfect harmony with his conduct in the opening scene. Nevertheless, the poet evidently does not wish him to forfeit thereby the sympathy of the spectator, though it is put to a very severe test. There are several things not only in the mental condition but also in the character of Lear which at first sight repel our modern feeling and which are not quite compatible with the ideal picture, gradually evolved by a long tradition, of the poor, noble, dignified King who is so cruelly treated by his children. We have already drawn attention to the traits which are indicative of a certain brutality, fierceness, arrogance, and capriciousness; to them we must add also a distinctly vindictive spirit which makes him find consolation in the hope that he will one day be able to pay back his daughters in their own coin. Further, it has been suggested by Kreyssig (p. 115) that to be so unspeakably offended by ingratitude is not a sign of a very noble character. Though ingratitude hurts, yet one who does good merely from inward compulsion, to whom the generous deed is an end in itself—and only such a character can we call truly unselfish—will find no venom in his disappointment. None will become incensed and embittered by ingratitude but he who has acted from calculation and has seen his calculation fail. There can be no doubt that Lear is embittered to a high degree. Lastly, we may see an unpleasant trait in the habit which the old King has of pitying himself. No one speaks so much of his venerable white hairs as he.

All these things might induce us to regard Lear from

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

*a point of view different from what the poet intended. For this reason it is important to bear in mind that in the play itself no sympathetic figure reproaches Lear for any of the traits mentioned ; they all look at the situation entirely from his standpoint, and this is also what Shakespeare wishes the spectator to do. The predominant impression is to be that of the monstrous irreverence shown to three of the most venerable human qualities here united in one person: fatherhood, old age, and kingship. Stress is laid, above all, on the unspeakable insult offered to the pride of a king who yet retains his dignity in his association with beggars as well as in his madness. This trait has been given an especial prominence. It agrees with the thought we constantly find in Shakespeare, that the true king is best shown by the way in which he preserves his dignity. (Katharine, the wife of Henry VIII, is a model of humility and Christian charity; yet even she, though on the point of death, dismisses from her service a messenger [IV, ii] merely because in his hurry he had entered without kneeling, and with the address "Your Grace" instead of "Your Highness.")*

Lear thus appears like an old, gnarled, stubborn oak-tree, vigorously resisting the tempest, unyielding, majestic, deep-rooted, upheld only by its own strength, and towering above all its fellows. His weaknesses may almost be said to be the necessary concomitants of his strong qualities. His vindictiveness appears to be a result of his strength, his savage maledictions seem due to his fiery temperament, his behaviour to people of lower rank would not have dishonoured him in that period, when, as is well known, Queen Elizabeth herself boxed her servants' ears with her own hands, and the Merchant of Venice, that model of "ancient Roman honour," publicly spat on the Jew. King Lear, therefore, is meant to be a sublime and truly noble figure, and the Earl of Gloster has good reasons for designating him in his madness as a "ruin'd piece of nature."

This view does not exclude what Kreyssig says of him :  
"He can conceive of no other relation between himself and

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

society than that on his side there should be the right to claim obedience and service and the power of dispensing mercy, and on the other the duties of supplication, gratitude, and devotion." A convinced royalist like Shakespeare would see no disparagement in this criticism, for this is practically his own conception of the proper relation between king and subject.<sup>1</sup> The attitude of the spectator, however, to the facts described above is sure to be influenced by this consideration, and the degree of his sympathy will largely depend on whether he looks for the humanly valuable part of a tragic character in some feeling which he considers as worthy from a social point of view or whether he would be prepared to regard such a character in actual life with nothing more than an æsthetic interest.

It is true that a number of expositors (Dowden, Bradley, etc.) see in Lear's tragedy a great process of purification, by means of which he is freed from the dross of vanity and selfishness and is led out of his blindness to a proper recognition of the true values of life. It is just his sufferings, they think, which draw him closer to us by bringing out his true human nature. By way of proof they adduce the words in which he shows for the fool a sympathy formerly unknown to him, and further the passage in which, being himself exposed to the inclemency of the weather, he for the first time remembers the houseless wretches who have to roam about with no protection :

Poor naked wretches wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these ? O ! I have ta'en  
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp ;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them  
And show the heavens more just.

III, iv

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the passage, which is perhaps the most significant one in this respect, in *Henry V*, IV, i, where it is even denied that the King is responsible to God for those about to be killed in the war he has set on foot, the fallacious reason being given that heaven may let the victims perish on this occasion because of their sins.



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

They also point to the recognition and contempt of empty appearance which are the products of his madness, his magnificent trenchant criticism of authority that lacks true moral sanction: "Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar? And the creature run from the cur? There thou might'st behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office." Lastly, his deepened sensibility is mentioned, as revealed by his preferring the company of Cordelia in his prison to all other joys in the world.

But the question is whether it is really consistent with Shakespeare's philosophy to see in this sequence of events an ascent of the character to a higher plane, a process of purification and perfection.

If we take up and examine singly the supposed stages of this upward evolution we cannot unreservedly agree with this conception. Does Shakespeare, for instance, associate compassion for the poor and wretched with a higher moral standpoint? We know that the social sense was very little developed in him. If in this manifestation of pity for the poor naked wretches the emergence of a higher morality was to be shown, we ought really to wonder why it stands quite alone in his works. This fact, indeed, tends to justify Crosby when he accuses Shakespeare of a total lack of social sense, because we seek in vain throughout his works for a single admission that poor people are sometimes unjustly left to starve and suffer want, that they occasionally raise just complaints, and that their endeavours to make these heard, so far from being ridiculous, are indeed the most serious facts of history. There is no passage where Shakespeare formulates a demand corresponding to the spirit of Lear's reflection in describing an ideal figure or laying down rules of life (like those given to Laertes by his father). It is quite probable that Lear's words are intended to furnish him with a sympathetic trait—that, as Edgar in the same drama once says of himself (IV, vi), he is "by the art of known and feeling sorrows" "pregnant to good pity." But we may be quite sure that Shakespeare, for the reasons adduced, would never have

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

taken this matter so seriously as to see in it a purification from adherent dross, whatever his interpreters may do !

That Lear in the further course of his madness comes to reject all that is unnatural and all claims that are morally unjustified, though sanctioned by tradition and authority, cannot be disputed. But it must be noticed that in this he does little more than follow the beaten track of the melancholy type, whose 'humour' especially delights in unmasking all kinds of shams; and the fact of his being greatly attracted by the naked Edgar, the "thing in itself," is a further manifestation of the Melancholy Man's predilection for the Diogenes attitude. Lear shows himself a truer representative of the melancholy type in yet another respect, viz., in his arguing and railing against women (*cf.* p. 156 *seq.*). His furious tirade against the unchastity of women—

Down from the waist they are Centaurs  
Though women all above . . .

IV, vi

—has really nothing to do with his own affairs.

Undoubtedly Lear's criticism shows profound insight ; but this recognition, as it stands here, is but an aspect of a mood and dependent on a state of mental derangement which may under certain circumstances disappear again, as is shown by the example of other melancholy characters. It would have to be confirmed by him in some form or other after his reason had been restored to sanity in order to make us see in it a real revolution of his philosophic outlook and a stage of his development.

This condition seems perhaps to be fulfilled indirectly by his behaviour to Cordelia, whose love he accepts with the unrestrained happiness of one who has got to know the world too well to expect from it anything further. But even his relation to Cordelia, when regarded from this point of view, would appear in a false light. What attracts Lear to Cordelia and makes him regard a life with her in the quiet dungeon as supremely desirable is doubtless the recognition of the true worth of her love, and his deeply pathetic cry when she is dead, "Howl, howl, howl, howl !

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

O! you are men of stones ! ” shows that by her death the innermost core of his existence has been destroyed. But this change is not to be regarded as a development of his character. That he has completely given up every idea of his kingdom, that he shows no further outburst of vindictiveness or indignation at the insults he has received, is really contrary to his nature and is due to the state of physical decrepitude into which he has fallen after his madness has left him. The thunderstorm has felled the oak. *His predominant feeling is one of weariness.* He is no longer able completely to grasp what is happening. He must make an effort to render the course of events clear to himself. When he recognizes Cordelia, who tenderly and with hot tears in her eyes bends over him, he so misunderstands the situation that he says: “ If you have poison for me I will drink it.” Gradually his mind becomes more lucid again. But when he says of himself, “ Pray you now, forget and forgive : I am old and foolish,” this recognition contains a sad truth, especially in view of his former high opinion of himself. Nothing is more touching than the fact that he is no longer the old Lear.

Edmund, too, now calls him the "old and miserable king" (V, iii, 47). Extreme weakness and helplessness, an infinitely pathetic relapse into childish ways of thinking and feeling, make him find supreme felicity in Cordelia's tenderness:

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out . .  
. . . and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones  
That ebb and flow by the moon.

This is not a purified Lear from whose character the flame of unhappiness has burnt away the ignoble dross,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

but a nature completely transformed, whose extraordinary vital forces are extinguished, or about to be extinguished.

This is the whole course of the drama: the story of a breakdown, of a decay accompanied by the most wonderful and fascinating phenomena comparable to the autumn decline of the year when the dying leaves appear in their most beautiful colours. It is not a development, but a decadence manifesting itself in a variety of forms, among others in that feeling of weakness which creates in the masterful old man, who so far has been centred entirely in himself, a sympathetic interest in the distress of others which he has never known before. Shakespeare's astonishing wisdom and experience of life are shown by the fact that he does not describe the great mental revolutions without reference to the corresponding physical alterations.

It is therefore a complete misunderstanding of the true state of affairs to regard Lear as greater at the close than at the beginning. He has become a different person; he is nearing his end. This is why Shakespeare had no use for the conclusion of the story of Lear as it had been handed down by tradition. According to the legend the old King, after the victory of Cordelia's troops, ascended his throne again as "a sadder and a wiser man," so to speak, and occupied it for some years more. For Shakespeare's broken old man this was unthinkable. The conflict between the action and the character would have been too patent, even grotesque. He had therefore to bring Lear's life to an end. This he did, anticipating at the same time the end of Cordelia, but still maintaining a certain connexion with the original source, because from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* we learn that after a long and happy reign, when smitten at last by misfortune, she had hanged herself in prison. By converting her voluntary death into a murder which cost Lear his life he did indeed heap a load of tragedy on the spectator's mind, a thing against which the latter had been rebelling for centuries as against an intolerable excess of horror.<sup>1</sup> On the other

<sup>1</sup> Tate's version, made in 1681, which makes the conflict end in a conciliatory manner, held undisputed sway until 1768, and later on still appeared occasionally on the English stage.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

hand, however, he secured by this issue, better than by any other, the possibility of working out the process of dissolution in *Lear* to its last stage. His master-hand even succeeded in building up on this foundation the most tragic effects of the whole play. A soul-stirring anti-climax is produced as his mental fire, which is slowly flickering out and again and again being obscured by the clouds of insanity, is once more fanned into a short, violent flame by the cruelty of the injuries he receives, a flame in which the last sparks of the powerful self-consuming passions flash forth, followed by eternal night. Here the action and the character-drawing are harmoniously blended in one perfect close.

7. THE GENERAL CAUSES OF DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN CHARACTER AND ACTION.—We have seen that Shakespeare, as a rule, starts with the action and follows it closely as long as possible. It is true that in many cases he seems to us to be more under its influence than is good for the drawing of character. But the method of explaining all the plots in which discrepancies may be observed between the action and the characters by reference to the original story is not applicable in all cases. Even in plots that are due entirely to his own invention, or have been constructed by him from materials already in existence and serving as a scaffolding for the erection of the dramatic edifice, the psychological foundations are not everywhere of the strongest kind, and much of it seems to have no visible foundation whatever. This criticism may be raised, for instance, against the sub-plot in *King Lear*. Shakespeare took this from a story he found originally in Sidney's *Arcadia*, relating how the bastard son of an old prince by hypocrisy and deceit poisons his stepfather's mind against his legitimate heir, and at last induces him to order the execution of his own child. Too late he recognizes that his credulity has delivered him into the hands of a villain, who thrusts him from the throne, sends him into exile, and has his eyes put out. Thereupon, however, the legitimate son, whose life had been spared by the executioner, turns up again and heaps coals of fire on the head of

190

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

his father, who is wandering about blind and helpless, by devoting to him all his love and self-sacrificing care. The original account, as we see, does not say that the father is estranged from his son all at once by a single stroke of villainy on the part of the bastard. But this is what Shakespeare makes of it. The development of the action in his play proceeds at a breakneck pace. First he shows how the father, the Earl of Gloster, upon receipt of a most clumsily forged letter forthwith renounces his beloved and devoted son Edgar and puts the slanderer in his place; then he asks us to believe that the victim unhesitatingly follows the slanderer's advice to flee from his father, and even helps to make the way clear for the bastard's villainy, allowing his father to surprise him in a pretended duel for which there is no real ground and which serves only to ruin him. All this is so flagrantly untrue to human nature that one is at a loss to understand how Shakespeare, with all his knowledge of men's souls, could make them behave in this way. For this reason notable critics of independent judgment, particularly Rümelin, have rightly confessed themselves puzzled by this procedure, and Tolstoi has taken faults like these for points of departure in his vehement attacks on Shakespeare's art. The essential impossibility of the whole action lies in the fact that it totally disregards all that must be assumed to have occurred before the beginning of the play. It is plain that in reality the bastard cannot simply transform himself one fine morning into a villain. On the contrary, his acquaintances must to a certain extent be familiar with his malignant and brutal disposition. We notice, indeed, that Shakespeare has made a sort of attempt to tone down this improbability by inserting the statement about the bastard that he had spent nine years abroad. This is done to make it probable that the others are not very well informed about his true nature. All the greater, however, is the knowledge and understanding which the father and the legitimate son may be assumed to have of each other's characters, and all the more improbable is it that the father would allow himself to be caught by such a clumsy trick of the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

bastard's, with whom he has had little intercourse as yet, and that the son himself should not demand to have an interview and explanation with him, etc., etc. One can only wonder, therefore, at the fact that some critics and careful readers have not taken the slightest exception to this scene.

This plot, however, is only a particularly striking instance of a general tendency that appears in a more or less strongly marked manner throughout Shakespeare's dramatic work. An explanation of it has been sought by Raleigh (p. 134 *seq.*), who says that "his opening scenes are often a kind of postulate, which the spectator or reader is asked to grant. At this stage of the play improbability is of no account; the intelligent reader will accept the situation and become alert and critical only when the next step is taken" which follows from it. The poet's purpose is only to make us unquestioningly assume the possibility that such and such people may find themselves in such and such a situation. On such presuppositions his plays are founded. Only then "the characters begin to live" and "come into ever closer and more vital relation to the course of events." We must object, however, to Raleigh's view on the ground that, apart from other errors, it fails to recognize a very important fact, viz., that psychological enigmas of the kind we have just been dealing with are presented not merely in the opening scenes, but that, as the whole course of our investigation shows, such discrepancies are found also in other passages throughout the plays.

Others have tried to make the general romantic character of Shakespeare's art responsible for these dramatic faults, averring that he is inclined to take liberties with the laws of reality, and have pointed to the apparitions, legendary themes (like the casket-choice in *The Merchant of Venice*), the impossible disguises, and many other absurdities in his plays. Now it is undeniable that Shakespeare is an out-and-out romantic, and that romanticism loves to stray from the paths of everyday life and to seek that which is strange, foreign, and adventurous. But we demand of it that in doing so it should remain in harmony with its own innermost

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

nature. No poet has shown more clearly than Shakespeare what heights can be attained by this combination of romanticism and ideal truth. Romanticism is neither in itself indifferent to correct psychological representation, nor is false psychology, as some appear to imagine, necessarily romantic. For this reason it is impossible to identify, as has been done, say, the introductory action of *Hamlet* or of *The Merchant of Venice* with the Gloster action described above. An apparition may be impossible from the point of view of natural science, but it is no psychological impossibility. As regards the story of Shylock, similar contracts are known to history. So the spectator finds no difficulty in entering into these psychological situations. Still less justice is there in the censure passed by Rümelin (p. 65 *seq.*) on the action of *Romeo and Juliet*. This critic says that the stratagem proposed by Friar Laurence, of saving Juliet by means of a deathlike sleep, is unthinkable, whereas a confession or flight would have been quite feasible. This is a failure to appreciate the romantic atmosphere of the piece, in which the strangeness of the proposal ceases to excite the incredulity of the spectator. More difficult does he find it to believe in the various disguises. Still, here his mind is finally set at rest by the tacit agreement which assumes as possible a blindness to masks which does not occur in real life. But it is quite otherwise when, in an action which is on the whole realistic enough and constructed and developed with psychological consistency, he comes to a passage containing what he has to regard as an impassable breach. In such cases, when a figure acts in such a way as he could not imagine himself or any other person capable of acting in *under the same circumstances*, we have to do not with romanticism, but simply with weakness.

We ask ourselves how such a weakness is to be explained, and how we are to regard this occasional conflict between character and story in Shakespeare's dramas. In order properly to understand it we must above all realize that many of the scenes in question are extraordinarily *effective on the stage*. The action develops before the eyes of even



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the dullest and slowest spectator in the most lively and most impressive manner. The intrigue of the Bastard, for example—which in the original is naturally a process occupying a considerable space of time—is condensed into a few effective stage pictures. The Bastard introduces himself to the audience as an intriguer; with well-acted clumsiness he tries to conceal a letter from his father, who now enters. This letter, which is supposed to have been written by the son, is read out and proves to be the right hook for catching the unsuspecting father. He swallows the bait, and the effect is seen at once in his disappointment, grief, and indignation. He renounces his son. The latter enters, and is frightened and driven away by the Bastard's half-true communication that his father is enraged against him. The intrigue has taken the most conspicuous, the most 'expressionist' shape imaginable. Shakespeare might instead of this opening have given, for instance, a conversation between two persons intimately acquainted with each other in which the events leading up to the decisive moment could have been explained with psychological consistency. In that case, however, the dramatic action would have been completely arrested, and, as Creizenach very aptly remarks, an inflation of the sub-action would have been produced. For this reason Shakespeare introduces the decisive starting-point itself, regardless of the loss to psychological truth which must inevitably result from such a condensation of these happenings. Of a very similar nature are the other cases in which he follows his original, e.g., the Malcolm scene (*cf.* p. 144 *seq.*).

But the fact that the unconvincing scenes are not devoid of effect on the stage, though interesting in itself, does not bring us much nearer the solution of our problem, for why are these scenes not *at the same time* effective on the stage and psychologically consistent, a combination Shakespeare brings about with wonderful success in other places? From whatever angle we look at the problem, there seems to be no other way of solving it than to admit the possibility that Shakespeare *occasionally neglects, in the most flagrant manner, to employ his highest artistic faculties.*

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

This neglect, in many instances, will be perceived even by the most uncritical eye. Especially is this the case in the lightly constructed comedies. A good example is afforded by the unspeakably clumsy intrigue in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where a villain, out of pure love of evil-doing, separates a betrothed pair by making her chambermaid appear at the lady's window and sending a servant up to her on a ladder. The lady's lover is made a witness of the scene; he promptly falls into the snare laid by the villain; his faith in his gentle, beautiful, and angelic betrothed vanishes immediately, but he keeps his discovery to himself until he meets her at the altar, and flings her wickedness in her face. She drops down in a swoon and he leaves her. There would have been an instantaneous explanation if the chambermaid had not, without any reason whatsoever, stayed away from the wedding. Then the enraged lover is informed that his betrothed is dead. After everything has been cleared up he is asked by the lady's father to receive another bride from his hand by way of atonement for the little faith he has had in her whom he supposes to be dead. He declares himself willing to make her his wife without having seen her, and thereupon receives back the girl he thought he had lost! It is quite superfluous to point out the psychological absurdities that have here been heaped one upon another.

Let us take, for another example, the action in *All's Well that Ends Well*. Boccaccio had told the story of the Count of Rousillon who will not marry upon command, but sends the woman whom the King of France has ordered him to marry the brusque and scornful message that he will not recognize her as his wife until she comes back to him with a ring he is wearing on his finger and a child by him. When she makes the impossible possible he is touched and put to shame. That she has exposed herself to such a humiliating situation is a proof of a great love, which conquers even him, and may be regarded on her part as an expiation of the wrong she has done in making him her husband by *force majeure*. Shakespeare has not worked this story out happily in every point. He makes the

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

loving wife accomplish her end by changing places with an honest young Florentine girl whom her husband tries to seduce. This girl turns up when the Count, his wife having disappeared, wishes to marry a second time. For a while, until his wife herself appears on the scene, she plays the part of the innocent victim and lays claim to him. But we are surprised to see the noble Count defending himself with the most villainous calumnies. He casts suspicion on the honour of the beautiful Florentine girl, whom he knows to be spotless, calls her a common soldiers' wanton, says that he is her victim, and so becomes guilty before our eyes of what we should call a serious crime, which, however, we are highly astonished to see taken so lightly by all those concerned. We need not wonder at this, because an equally superficial view is taken of the whole problem of winning the husband's love. The few short sentences Boccaccio devotes to this part of the story tell us far more about it. That love can give no bills of exchange no one in the piece seems to recognize. Another fault is the lack of agreement between the character of the heroine and the action of the play. A woman who has energy enough to win a man twice in the way indicated ought to possess more will-power and not show the sentimental traits which come out, particularly in her conversations with the Countess. And she would hardly go about weeping in such a manner that even the steward becomes an involuntary witness of her love complaints.

We ought also to examine more closely certain parts of the action in *Measure for Measure*. Shakespeare is here confronted by a difficult problem; a sister has the chance to save her brother's life by abandoning herself for a night to Angelo, the Duke's deputy. In the old play by Whetstone, the original source, the sacrifice is actually made; the villain, nevertheless, orders the execution to take place, and only a touch of human kindness in the gaoler preserves the brother from death. The sister is ignorant of this change, and, beside herself with indignation, applies to the King. The King now commands that the villain shall marry the sister and then be beheaded, but the

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

sister entreats the King to save her husband's life, despite all the wrong he has done her. The King, however, refuses to listen to her, and shows mercy only when the brother, who has escaped death, reveals himself as still living. The way in which Shakespeare deals with this complicated subject is most remarkable. Though usually we cannot reproach him with any tendency to disentangle complicated plots in the *Family Herald* style, yet here he succeeds in evading the given solution. His humane delicacy of feeling evidently rebels against the idea of representing on the stage a noble, innocent girl abandoning herself against her will to a man in order thereby to purchase anything—even the life of her own brother. That this woman afterward begs for the life of the villain would have to be accounted for by the fact that, in the meantime, she has begun to love him despite his unworthiness. Though this is psychologically not impossible, yet it is a complicated problem. Now Shakespeare tries to evade difficult problems of the female soul, a peculiarity in which he clearly distinguishes himself from contemporary authors like Dekker, Heywood, Beaumont and Fletcher, etc. They—in this respect much more progressive than he—have a certain preference for placing in the centre of their representations the changeable nature of the female character, as in *A Woman killed with Kindness*, *The Honest Whore*, *The Maid's Tragedy*. Shakespeare, then, seeks a way out of the difficulty. It is interesting to see how he finds it. He puts a new figure on the boards. The villainous Angelo, who makes the criminal proposal to the poor Isabella, in Shakespeare's play has at one time been betrothed to a girl whom he jilted when she lost her fortune. To this woman, then, whose name is Mariana, Isabella hurries and asks her secretly to change places with her and in her stead go to the meeting with Angelo, which is to take place in the dark. What an unheard-of, what a revolting thing to ask of a poor forsaken girl! But will she not refuse to make this sacrifice of her dignity? Is not the other girl obliged to use entreaties and tears and go down on her knees in order to move her? Nothing

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of the kind ! Mariana is ready in a moment to entrap the faithless lover by this union in the dark. It is astonishing to see with how little self-esteem a woman is credited here. This solution corresponds to the mentality of Boccaccio, the son of the fourteenth century. It is on a level with the morality of the middle and lower classes of medieval society, but certainly not with the ideas of the beginning of the seventeenth century, the views of which regarding women, as we meet with them in Overbury, Hall, etc., after all represent a considerably higher moral standard than is found in those earlier times. Are we to assume, then, that Shakespeare, who in other places gives evidence of such an exquisite feeling for human dignity, was not alive to the questionable character of this solution ? <sup>1</sup>

No one would be inclined to hold this view of the poet who has created such infinitely sensitive and profoundly

<sup>1</sup> In the light of what has just been said it is not without interest to look at the explanation which has been given of the action in *The Winter's Tale* (Act I). There King Leontes of Sicily is seized by an absolutely groundless jealousy of Polixenes, King of Bohemia, his guest. Beside himself with rage at having been, as he imagines, wronged by his friend in his conjugal rights, he gives Camillo, his steward, the order to murder the offender. The honest Camillo sees that he is not amenable to rational argument, and therefore adopts the only practical course of being perfectly candid with the threatened guest, who thereupon immediately makes up his mind to flee the country, accompanied by Camillo. It is true that in this way he does not show a great consideration for the wife of his host, on whom the suspicion has fallen equally with himself. This ungenerous behaviour has greatly displeased Furness, the American Shakespearean scholar and distinguished editor of the Variorum Shakespeare. He therefore makes the most painful efforts to extract a meaning from the text which represents the guest as not sufficiently informed of the fact that the King's worst suspicion falls upon his wife also, and makes him hold the opinion "that this flight of his is all that is needed eventually to restore sunshine to the Court." "For," we are told, "purposely to leave the queen behind to bear the full brunt of Leontes' revenge would be so contemptible as to forfeit every atom of our respect for him."

Unfortunately, however, this interpretation of the text, which has also been approved and transcribed by the editor of the play in the "Arden" edition, is quite out of the question. The suspected King of Bohemia knows perfectly well what he is accused of, and so does the spectator. What other crime does Furness imagine that he could think himself accused of ? The reference to adultery, contained in the words that he "had touch'd his queen forbiddenly," is unambiguous enough and cannot be used, in combination with an unusual expression in a subsequent passage (I, ii, 259 seq.), for imputing to the Bohemian king an odd misunderstanding of the state of affairs which the author never thought of. *The only purpose of all this is obviously to make the King act in a more chivalrous manner toward a lady, as if—cf. the cases discussed above—the most indispensable quality of a Shakespearean hero were a highly chivalrous behaviour toward ladies !*

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

emotional women as, for instance, Desdemona. The reason for this is clearly his taking the most convenient solution that came to his hand, and in this case he must have felt sure—a fact most significant of the views held by his spectators as to the relation of the sexes—that he was not giving any offence to his audience. And it is also most probable that nothing but this preference for the line of least resistance led him to those often criticized conclusions, of which we have an example in *Measure for Measure*. There, for the purpose of quickly bringing about a happy ending, the villainous and criminal Angelo is forgiven his dark designs, frustrated after a great deal of trouble, anxiety, and grief, on the ground, which is more than doubtful from a moral point of view, that they had been only bad intentions, and that intentions were only thoughts, and thoughts need not be punished. This conclusion was evidently written rather hastily. When at the end the brother, whom everybody supposes to be dead, unexpectedly turns up again alive, neither he nor his sister, who for his sake has undergone the greatest mental sufferings, has a word to say to the other. It seems that the poet has simply forgotten this.<sup>1</sup>

It is not necessary, however, to wander so far from our point of departure. Traits incompatible with one another are also evident in the character of Gloster in *King Lear*. Bradley was the first to point out a great number of inconsistencies in that play. The list of them might easily be extended by examples from other dramas. The peculiar practice we are dealing with here can be understood properly only if we consider it in connexion with all the similar peculiarities in Shakespeare. We cannot fail to notice that because of it his creative activity, regarded as a whole, again and again produces the impression, despite the carefully thought out construction of great parts of his work—e.g., of a tragedy like *Othello*—of an instinctive, impulsive, and altogether sketchy mode of working. His development proceeds more or less unconsciously. His enormous steps

<sup>1</sup> That these are traits typical of the Elizabethan drama is shown by Creizenach, *loc. cit.*, iv, p. 306 seq.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

*in advance are never consciously secured and maintained, and they are regularly followed by relapses into the most primitive form.* This we have seen already in such simple matters as the monologue. It also appears in the return to the epical kind of drama, represented by *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which he again abandons the concentrated form of action which in other plays is his most splendid achievement. It is further shown in the most various aspects of his art. Original observations of nature, more acute than any made by his contemporaries, are intermingled with worthless stereotyped patterns handed down by literary tradition. He preserves with a conscientiousness unparalleled in his time the local colour in pieces like *Romeo and Juliet*, and elsewhere intersperses his plays with staggering breaches of the illusion and quite deliberate anachronisms. He characterizes the speaker in one instance by the most subtle inflections of expression, and in another makes all his figures talk in the same key (*cf.* p. 94 *seq.*). He feels himself obliged to state so thoroughly all the reasons for Iago's wickedness that we may almost say he has given us too many, and on the other hand he asks us to accept the malignity of Lady Macbeth without being told a word about its cause. This amazing irregularity produces differences of value in his work which only those can fail to perceive who find all his productions of equal excellence simply because they are altogether lacking in the specific power of discrimination.

Nor is it admissible to claim for all these things a profound artistic purpose. From this fault even such a widely read and carefully trained student of the Elizabethan drama as Creizenach is not quite free, when in many of Shakespeare's plays he discovers the conscious "method" (*iv*, p. 325) "of making the principal characters stand out in bolder relief by means of a comparatively less plastic modelling of all the others." This conception is as anachronistic, and rests on the very same foundations, as the opinion of Brandes, which we have touched upon in another place, that the lax form of *Antony and Cleopatra* had been chosen in order to do justice to the greatness of

200

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

the events (*cf.* p. 135). Not earlier than the twentieth century, with its differentiation and utilization of all artistic means, was it possible to suppose *that in the treatment of single parts, in order to secure a heightening of the total effect, the more primitive form should be intentionally and methodically preferred to the more advanced.* This explanation, as we can easily see, is devised by means of unconscious trains of thought from such modern tendencies in art as, *e.g.*, Lenbach's treatment of figure outline in his portraits and in Rodin's suggestions in marble. But how could Shakespeare have deliberately placed before his audience a method which has given offence to highly cultured outsiders even in our times? Moreover, this view does not even explain why the psychological blanks and errors—*e.g.*, in *Macbeth* (*cf.* p. 144 *seq.*)—should be regarded as of unqualified advantage to the main action; one might rather say that the advantage is of such a doubtful nature that we can hardly attribute it to Shakespeare's conscious intention, for, as Browning says in a similar connexion:

. . . any sort of meaning looks intense  
When all beside itself means and looks nought.  
*Fra Lippo Lippi*

With respect to this matter Bradley is certainly right when he says somewhere that Shakespeare, after all, *lacked the conscience of the artist who is determined to do everything as well as he can.*

The only access to the solution of this problem is through the personality of Shakespeare. This personality, however, is not sufficiently clear and distinct to permit more than feebly supported conjectures to be based on it. But we are involuntarily reminded of the traditional description of Henry Fielding—recently discredited by W. Cross—who was said to be so utterly indifferent to the theatre, for which he wrote in order to make a living, that he did not think it worth while to work for it with more than half his power, and who even experienced a kind of ironical satisfaction when the audience, by hissing the weak passages in his plays, showed more taste than he had credited them



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

with. To this analogy it may be objected that Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity with his audiences, and was evidently on good terms with the public ; still, a careful review of all the extant references to the dramatists of the time shows that he was ranked only *as one artist among many*, though his achievements tower high above theirs. This estimation was possible only on the supposition that he failed to make his audiences appreciate many things in which he was far in advance of his age, and which perhaps he himself rightly regarded as the best portions of his art. One can well imagine that to see them neglected reacted upon his creative activity.

This reason, however, is only the most conspicuous link in a chain of *possibilities* which may easily lead us too far into the realm of airy conjectures, and we do not hesitate to admit that perhaps a good deal could be said in favour of the view which finds in this habit of careless composition nothing but a necessary concomitant of Shakespeare's natural disposition. His gigantic imagination presupposes an emotional life which has great difficulty in imposing laws upon itself. Grillparzer says of Shakespeare very profoundly, "Like God, he thinks in terms of imagination and creation" (*Werke*, ii, p. 190). And, indeed, this soul realizes itself in ceaseless new experiences ; it depends on the succession of a thousand moods, in each of which it sees the things around itself in a different light. It is too rich to need to put its talent out to usury, too little conscious of itself to submit to self-discipline, too creative to be interested in theories. He is—in this sense his contemporaries were perfectly right—*nature herself*, and if we include within the definition of art, as was done by that age, the conscious and consistent observation of certain clearly formulated rules in the treatment of reality, Ben Jonson was thoroughly justified in his apparently paradoxical pronouncement on the greatest artist of all ages : Shakespeare, he said, "wanted art."

# V

## MOTIVES FOR ACTION

**M**OTIVES EXPLICITLY STATED (SHYLOCK, IAGO, HAMLET, PRINCE HENRY).—In no department of Shakespeare's art do we find such irregularity as in his dealing with the motives for action. It has therefore become the happy hunting-ground of the most daring and extravagant critics, the starting-point of the most fundamentally diverse interpretations of his characters. But as has been shown in the preceding chapters, it will not be impossible to base our conclusions on the firm ground of facts if we try to form a picture of his method of working that is not contradictory to the results we have so far obtained.

The first peculiarity that strikes us is one that cannot surprise us, knowing, as we do, how he strove after a plain and popular form of expression. Information that in a modern drama must be deduced from the action itself, or gathered indirectly from the dialogue of the principal or secondary personages, the monologues of the heroes serving at most to supplement it, is here imparted, in all essentials, by just these monologues, which especially in the great tragedies give us, ready made, all the knowledge necessary for our judgment of the speaker's character. Brutus, for instance, unreservedly opens his soul to the penetrating gaze of the spectator, and exposes the motives of his actions in his monologue, and Macbeth, with that self-knowledge of which, against all probability, even the villains of Shakespeare are capable (*cf.* p. 35 *seq.*), carefully enlightens the audience :

I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other.

I, vii

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

What clearly distinguished reasons, too, does Shylock give when he discloses the threefold root of his hatred against Antonio in the following speech :

I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him,  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls interest. I, iii

This absolutely plain and unmistakable exposition of the Jew's point of view has been seized upon and subjectively interpreted, according to their own personal point of view, by critics who are accustomed to read more *between* the lines than *in* them. They have endeavoured to upset the ethical balance which Shakespeare intended to establish between the parties, being induced to take this line by the fact that the standards of morality have changed in many respects since his time. We now regard Shylock's enemies, the gay cavaliers and dowry-hunters, the royal merchant suffering from an aristocratic weariness of the world, largely as drones for whom we have but little sympathy. On the other hand, we sympathize with the Jew, who voices the bitter feeling of his race, due to incessant insults, in such powerful and touching language. The contention of these critics would be acceptable only if the Jew's behaviour were not in agreement with the reasons expressed in his words. Now the fact is that there is a perfect agreement. As most characteristic, we need point out only the cunning manner in which he utilizes the chance of laying a snare for the merchant by getting him to sign the bond. When Antonio's friend, grown suspicious, warns him against signing the gruesome document Shylock pretends, with masterly hypocrisy, that the whole affair is nothing more than a joke ; he even goes the length of

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

simulating offence because the arrangement is taken seriously at all :

O father: Abram, what these Christians are,  
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect  
The thoughts of others ! Pray you, tell me this ;  
If he should break his day, what should I gain  
By the exaction of the forfeiture ?

I, iii

We see clearly that a conception which regards Shylock as the avenger who by chance obtains an opportunity of exacting retribution for his downtrodden race, and who cannot be expected to show mercy to his enemies who, on their part, treat him without pity, strays far from the poet's intention. This passage alone suffices to show how, on the contrary, he tries to entrap his unsuspecting enemy by cunning and perfidy. Nor can we overlook the fact that the fury of the Jew, due to sordid avarice against the merchant who lends money without interest, and the hatred against the Christian, which springs from racial pride, are meant to be important motives, in conjunction with the vindictiveness of one who has been oppressed and ill-treated.

Scientific Shakespearean criticism, however, has never taken the so-called Shylock question very seriously ; the text of the drama was too clear an argument against it. Still, the case is useful as affording instruction of the degree of arbitrariness and neglect of the text to which Shakespearean exegesis can sink in a comparatively simple instance. Similar mistakes, of almost the same gravity, are committed on other occasions by many of the most exact interpreters who in the case of Shylock rightly admit the poet's own words to be the only canon of judgment. A case in point is that of Iago. We have already spoken of his character, and that of the model from which it was taken. The motives of his actions are clearly indicated in his monologues and his confidential communications. These, however, a number of very notable critics refuse to take for Gospel truth, because Iago says things of himself which they cannot believe, in view of his character, to be the real

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

incentives of his actions. He states that his ambition has been wounded by the preference shown to Cassio, that his jealousy and desire of revenge have been aroused by the suspicion that the Moor has seduced his wife ; further, that he loves Desdemona and wishes to possess her, that he also thinks it possible that she loves Cassio, that he fears Cassio's attentions to his wife, and, lastly, that he is vexed at Cassio's integrity—these are all reflections which Coleridge was one of the first to discredit by the famous saying : " The motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity."

This view is shared by the great majority of German Shakespearean critics, who also refuse to take these reasons seriously. Kreyssig is of opinion that Iago, by this kind of talk, is trying to hide his own malignity from himself, as may be clearly recognized from his accusing his wife of infidelity, though he himself is more than half doubtful of this possibility. He is not jealous either, continues the same critic, only he enjoys playing the part of the injured husband, who therefore is justified in seeking revenge, and in the same manner he drags in specious reasons from the most remote quarters. Gervinus and Ulrici agree in finding in Iago an unconscious tendency to persuade himself of having valid reasons for his conduct, and thus to suppress any faint stirrings of conscience. Brandes allows that in the other monologues of Shakespeare the characters reveal themselves without reserve, and that even a villain like Richard III is quite honest in his soliloquies ; in the case of Iago, however, says Brandes, the reasons stated by him are not his real motives, but " attempts made without much sincerity to understand himself, merely self-palliating self-explanations." Iago in his monologues is always furnishing specious reasons for his hatred. Similarly, Bradley concludes that the reasons cannot be the right ones because Iago's conduct in nowise corresponds to his motives ; he does not create the impression of a man suffering from frustrated ambition or burning hatred, sexual jealousy or concupiscence.

In order to be able to decide these questions we must

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

first of all adhere closely to the text of Shakespeare. It is true that there we find Iago expressing his mortification to Roderigo that he has been passed over in favour of the bookish scholar Cassio, and has risen no higher than to be the Moor's "ancient," and we may be sure, therefore, that this reason is meant to be of importance here; but the decisive part is played in the tragedy by the monologues of the opening scenes, in which the naïve technique of the author makes the villain unmask himself before the audience, not merely in part, but altogether. In these two monologues, however, Iago says no word of the slight he has received by not being promoted. Yet on both occasions he utters the suspicion that the Moor has seduced his wife, and his resolve to be avenged. Apparently, therefore, his hope of being promoted after the removal of Cassio is only a subsidiary motive. The question now arises whether he really believes in the Moor's guilt or not. Brandes confesses himself unable to see how Iago could have believed in it, because he is far too intelligent to think himself deceived by the Moor, having stated, only a few lines before, that Othello is "of a constant, loving, noble nature." This objection of Brandes, however, is refuted by two facts. On the one hand, as has been demonstrated above (p. 59 *seq.*), no capital must be made out of the opinion the villain expresses about the hero. On the other hand, a later passage of the drama (IV, ii) proves that Iago has, after all, been seriously troubled by his suspicion of the Moor and has worried his wife with it, because Emilia, in a passage interwoven with great dramatic skill for the purpose of explanation, refers to it, saying of the slanderer of Desdemona, who is unknown to her:

Some such squire he was  
That turn'd your wit the seamy side without,  
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

IV, ii

The author has evidently imagined this reason to be the principal motive of Iago's conduct. That he makes him take it more seriously than, after all, he ought to take it

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

is suggested by an extremely primitive touch. Iago is made to say :

I hate the Moor ;  
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets  
He has done my office : I know not if 't be true ;  
But I for mere suspicion in that kind  
Will do as if for surety.

*So here we find an undercurrent of his thought intentionally brought to light in the most naïve form. So far as this reason is to be regarded as a specious one, it is noted as such in quite unmistakable words. When the poet, however, makes him say,*

That Cassio loves her ; I do well believe it ;  
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit,  
II, i

we first of all experience a kind of surprise. Is it possible that the shrewd intriguer should not recognize the harmlessness of the relations existing between those two people, that he should be stupider than the "sick fool" Roderigo, who rightly observed nothing but politeness and friendliness in the mutual behaviour of Desdemona and Cassio? We must adhere closely to the facts in order to find the proper answer. Iago has just been intently watching the two in conversation and following the little gallantries of the good, simple Cassio with malicious asides. While he is doing this the idea arises in his sordid mind that Cassio may be in love with her. That this for a certain time is really his opinion is confirmed by the scene immediately following (II, iii), in which he apparently tries to sound the unsuspecting Cassio :

*Cassio.* Welcome, Iago ; we must to the watch.

*Iago.* Not this hour, lieutenant, 'tis not yet ten o' the clock. Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona ; who let us not therefore blame : he has not yet made wanton the night with her, and she is sport for Jove.

*Cassio.* She's a most exquisite lady.

*Iago.* And, I'll warrant her, full of game.

*Cassio.* Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate creature.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

*Iago.* What an eye she has ! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation.

*Cassio.* An inviting eye ; and yet methinks right modest.

*Iago.* And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love ?

*Cassio.* She is indeed perfection.

*Iago.* Well, happiness to their sheets ! Come, lieutenant.

It is permissible to see here an attempt on the part of Iago to force matters—*i.e.*, to induce Cassio to talk. His frivolous tone, with the deliberate lies—Desdemona's eye "a parley to provocation" !—is intended to untie Cassio's tongue and make him confess his desire. But the decency of Cassio and the purity of his heart render these attempts ineffectual. He does not even suspect the drift of the other's remarks. If we adopt this explanation of the scene—as is done by Wetz (p. 281)—there can remain no doubt that Iago had really for a time seriously entertained the suspicion which he pronounces in the monologue, and that the scene has been inserted in order to show how entirely devoid of foundation it is. As regards the line, however,

That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit,

it does not mean, as Vischer, for instance, thinks it does, that Iago here for a moment believes in Desdemona's love for Cassio or suggests this belief to himself. He only wishes to say that his plan of making Othello jealous of Cassio is favoured by the fact that her love for the handsome Cassio *must appear* as thoroughly "apt and of great credit."

When Iago further says that he too loves Desdemona, not out of lust, but rather in order to satisfy his thirst for revenge on the Moor, further reflections on the "love" of Iago are rendered unnecessary by the recognition, resulting from the context, that here by "I love" is meant "I wish to possess her." This is also proved by the fact that Iago is only at the commencement of his intrigue and still deliberating whether he shall take his revenge in this manner or by instigating the Moor to be jealous of Cassio. All this, as we see, is well thought out, and in no wise



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

makes the impression of mere far-fetched specious reasons invented on the spur of the moment.

Iago's fear now that Cassio may be his rival for the affection of his wife must appear highly improbable, even ridiculous, in view of the actual facts; because, in the first instance, Cassio has already a regular love-affair, and, secondly, Iago suspects in the same breath that he loves Desdemona. Such a suspicion would brand Cassio as a thorough Don Juan, while, as to Iago, it merely serves to emphasize his profoundly mistrustful nature. Wolff, then, is right in the view he takes of this side of Iago's nature; it is that "vile suspiciousness" in him which is ready to credit any person with any kind of baseness. It is not the case, therefore, as the old expositors, beginning with Coleridge, thought, that his essential depravity made him hunt for reasons in order to palliate his actions to himself. Quite the contrary! Stirrings of conscience in this sense are unknown to Iago, and palliations he does not require. (Only in one later passage does there appear a trait which is out of harmony with Iago's nature as delineated here. This is his remark about his rival,

if Cassio do remain  
He has a daily beauty in his life,  
That makes me ugly,

V, i

which betrays a jealousy of the other man's virtue that is undoubtedly in strong contradiction to his own depravity.) Thus we have come back to that more literal conception of the sense on which we have always made it our principle to insist.

We certainly have to admit that this method may create difficulties in the interpretation of the character. Considering the nature of Iago, there seems to be neither a sufficiently grave insult nor a sufficient check to his ambition to account for his choosing such a fiendish method of revenge, and, moreover, the gratification of these two feelings in the further course of the action is quite overshadowed by his love of intrigue and his delight

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

in his own malignity. Bradley therefore is right when he points out that he shows no such great satisfaction as we ought to expect on really obtaining Cassio's post, and that his pleasure at the success of his wiles is not that of the wronged husband or lover who experiences the triumph of "getting even, wife for wife." No one, indeed, will receive the impression that Iago is an avenger of his supposedly outraged honour—himself a kind of Othello. Rather do we see him acting obviously out of wickedness, impelled by an evil disposition that makes him envious, malicious, and distrustful. When, for instance, he solicits Desdemona's kindness in favour of Cassio because he knows that thereby she is rendering herself more than suspect in the eyes of her husband, and then with triumphant malignity rejoices at the fact that he "out of her own goodness makes the net that shall ensnare them all" (II, iii), or when he wants to sully the angelic woman by making her use the word 'whore,' as uttered by the raging Othello—

*Desdemona.* An I that name, Iago?

*Iago.*

What name, fair lady?

IV, ii

—his behaviour ceases to have any affinity to vindictiveness or wounded ambition, and we see him actuated merely by hellish malignity.

Now if we hold that the reasons alleged by Iago for his actions do not strike us as the real impelling forces, we do not thereby wish to represent them in any way as subjective imaginations of Iago. If that were to be assumed full scope would be given to every kind of arbitrary procedure in Shakespearean criticism. In that case it might be said, for example, of the threefold motives of Shylock's hatred against Antonio that two of the reasons were due to subjective imagination, the only real motive being his desire to vindicate his race. But this would be to ignore the primitive character of this artistic device. It is certainly not to be assumed (*cf.* p. 19 *seq.*)—indeed, it is rendered more than improbable by the other primitive sides of his art—that the author would have placed

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

such great obstacles in the way of the spectator's understanding as would be represented by a monologue containing subjective truths but substantial falsehoods. It is just the careful way in which, as we have shown above, Shakespeare prevents his villain and his hero from appearing in a false light that makes it impossible to assume that in this case no such care has been taken. The monologue, in this and other instances of the same kind, is intended to give aids to the understanding of the action, not, however—a view which would fail to grasp the essence of the Shakespearean drama—to light up the character of the hero by adding new and interesting touches to it. *It must be made a principle to deny that Shakespeare makes any character in a monologue state reasons for his actions that are not meant to be substantially correct and sufficient.* It is true that thereby the expression of the unconscious workings of the soul is more or less prevented. This is not done, as Stoll thinks, because the age was ignorant of all the more subtle mental processes. There is no author who has a more profound knowledge of mental processes than Shakespeare. We need no further proof of this than such subtle reflections as that in *The Tempest* describing one who

Having unto truth, by telling of it,  
Made such a sinner of his memory  
To credit his own lie.

I, ii

Here it is clearly pointed out how a substantial falsehood can become a subjective truth. This recognition, however, is of no practical importance for the drama. Here such subtlety is quite clearly avoided in order that the action may be always intelligible and clear to a large multitude. In cases, however, where the action shows the reasons stated to be incorrect a similar state of affairs prevails, as, for instance, when in *Hamlet* King Claudius, though imagined and depicted as a wretched creature, does not *appear* as such. We then have a discrepancy which results from the poet's instinctive processes of creation conflicting

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

with his conscious intention. A similar, though not so extensive, disagreement must probably be admitted in the case of Iago. His actions on the whole are provided by Shakespeare with *an excess of motives*. This is a thing to which we are accustomed in ordinary life. When we state too many reasons for our acts or omissions one counteracts the other, and in the end none of them appears quite credible. It is a similar *mistake* which Shakespeare commits here.

In precisely the same way shall we have to regard the monologue in which the action in *Hamlet*, having reached its culminating point, suddenly comes to a standstill. The ghost of his father has revealed to Hamlet the crime of the usurping brother and charged him to take revenge. Hamlet has so far hesitated to carry out this purpose; he wishes to have the proofs of his uncle's guilt demonstrated before his eyes. The company of players is to help him to accomplish this. The behaviour of the King during the play which reproduces his own crime will betray him if he is guilty. The plot succeeds, for the King's remarkable conduct reveals to Hamlet, without any possibility of doubt, a mind oppressed by the consciousness of guilt. It is clear that the ghost has told the truth, and the purpose of revenge must be carried out. The avenger is assisted by chance; on the way to his mother he meets the royal criminal alone and unarmed. But—he is at prayer! Is Hamlet now to commit the deed?

That would be scann'd :

A villain kills my father, and for that,  
I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven.

O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
He took my father grossly, full of bread,  
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,  
And how his audit stands who knows save Heaven?  
But in our circumstance and course of thought,  
'Tis heavy with him : and am I then revenged,  
To take him in the purging of his soul,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

When he is fit and season'd for his passage ?

No !

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent :

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed ;

At game, a-swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in 't ;

Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,

And that his soul may be as damn'd and black

As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays :

This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

These lines give, circumstantial and clear, the reasons for his inaction. Almost every notable critic, however, declares them unworthy of serious consideration, and prefers to see in them a kind of self-deception. Hamlet is unwilling to act, unable to act, and, as Kreyssig says, "his practised ingenuity comes quickly to his aid and wraps his lack of energy in the venerable cloak of cautious deliberation." Vischer too thinks that the principal reason must lie in his own inner nature, and similar opinions are expressed by Brandes. The question has been examined most exhaustively by Löning. To him all that is said by Hamlet in this speech appears as mere "excogitated sophistries." His revenge, he holds, is concerned only with the killing of the King. To what comes afterward the avenger may be quite indifferent. Moreover, Hamlet must be conscious that a mere act of praying is not sufficient to get the King into heaven.

This last view is not tenable, however. The question is what the Elizabethan audience, for whom these lines were written, would think of the situation presented here. Now there is a passage in Nashe's famous novel of adventure, *Jack Wilton*, which had certainly been read by Shakespeare, where we see the great importance assigned by the superstition of the age to a person's behaviour at the moment of death. We are told how a man is seized and rendered defenceless by his mortal enemy. He entreats him to spare his life, and declares himself ready in return for this favour to do anything that may be desired of him.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Then his malevolent enemy is reminded of a "notable new Italianism" by means of which one may kill the soul as well as the body. He orders his victim to sell his soul to the devil, forces him to utter the most horrible curses on all that is holy, and at the same moment suddenly shoots him through the neck, so that he sinks down without being able to speak or make a sign of repentance. From this we learn how seriously the circumstances under which a person dies may be taken. In the same circle of ideas moves Othello, whom the furious desire to make an end of Desdemona does not prevent from first asking her whether she has "pray'd to-night," for, says he :

I would not kill thy unprepared spirit.

No ; heaven forfend ! I would not kill thy soul.

V, ii

What Hamlet himself regards as so especially terrible in his father's murder is the fact that he was overtaken by it with no time for repentance. The importance of this circumstance, therefore, is by no means exaggerated by him in order to deceive himself. It is true that thereby he shows himself an especially severe, even cruel, avenger. But no one will maintain that Hamlet is a soft-hearted character. This opinion would be untenable if only in view of his treatment of Polonius' body. He who follows Goethe in calling Hamlet without reserve "a fine, pure, noble, supremely moral being" must be said to disregard the facts. Equally untenable is the objection that Hamlet is too great a sceptic seriously to believe in such a possibility, which is credible only to people living in the darkest superstition. Is it conceivable that he who speaks of the life beyond as "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns," who ponders on the possibility of dreams occurring in the sleep of death, should seriously in this case take up the standpoint of the firmest belief? This objection also, as has been demonstrated above (*cf.* p. 117 *seq.*), is without the slightest weight.

It will therefore be inadmissible to use these reasons for proving that Hamlet in this monologue is seeking

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

pretexts for delaying his action and finding them in things in which he himself does not seriously believe. *We must make it a principle to exclude any possibility of such an idea.* If the reasons stated by Hamlet had been intended to be merely specious ones Shakespeare would at least have made Hamlet add, with that knowledge of himself which elsewhere distinguishes him, "But I am only deceiving myself; in reality I cannot force myself to do the deed," though this would, to some degree, modify the sense. Nothing of the kind is done, however, and though later (III, iv, 107 *seq.*) he reproaches himself in a general way it is without reference to the scene under discussion.

Now an upholder of the hitherto accepted view of Shakespeare's art might perhaps object that the proofs we have given do not bring us much farther. He would say that it may be that the reasons adduced by Hamlet are in themselves sufficient; to him, however, they do not seem to be so. This is to say, one could well imagine that an especially embittered and revengeful enemy would refrain from committing the deed at the moment when he saw the possibility of carrying it out in a still more cruel manner. It need not be denied either that Hamlet's character might be credited with this cruelty—though with a certain amount of reluctance. Yet, on the other hand, it is just this Hamlet with whom we are here dealing, the man who is always hesitating and reluctant to act, who gives us the impression that reasons which to another would seem thoroughly good and sufficient have in his case no decisive influence upon the will. This view is apparently confirmed by the fact that on other occasions also he is seen to shrink from the deed, though no reasons can be discovered there of the kind we are concerned with here. Up to this point all his acting has been a continual delaying; therefore it is a quite obvious conclusion that we should regard his failure to act in this case as not due to the reasons he adduces, but as arising from a peculiarity of his character. This objection, however, is at once refuted by the inquiry we have instituted above into the relation of character and action. Shakespeare elaborates the

216

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

character and refines it, but retains the action. Now it is remarkable that this pivot of the action is found already in the *Urhamlet* (cf. p. 149 *seq.*), a fact which is further proved by Marston's play *Antonio's Revenge*, which presents so many analogies to Shakespeare's drama and even utilizes this very situation. The avenger in this piece also meets the criminal under circumstances favourable to the deed, but does not carry it out because he does not think a speedy death terrible enough for his victim. Considering the limitations of Marston's art, no one will suppose that this behaviour is the effect of subtle mental undercurrents. The same circumstances, however, were drawn by Shakespeare from the old play.

The theory formulated here must not be reduced *ad absurdum* by pointing to the cases where Hamlet in his monologue speaks of his cowardice (IV, iv, 43 *passim*). This fact might possibly be used as an objection to what has been said, and the conclusion drawn. If the statements made in the monologue for the purpose of self-explanation are always intended to be substantially correct, Hamlet's failure to act is meant to be due to cowardice. This supposition, however, as we clearly see from the rest of the play, is not correct. Now we might conclude that, after all, reasons for acting are stated in the monologue which are not meant to correspond to reality. This conclusion, however, would be entirely fallacious. The explanation is that a melancholy character, more than any other, is naturally liable to give vent to self-reproaches and doubts, by means of which he spurs himself to action. Nothing else is intended in Hamlet's case. No motive for the action, in the proper sense of the word, is given thereby; so the special circumstances, which in the case of this character are naturally somewhat complicated, must not blind our eyes to the much more simple and primitive nature of the other cases.

An especially conspicuous instance of this primitiveness is to be found in the famous first monologue of Prince Hal, and, what is more, we are here presented with a counterpart to the case of Iago, inasmuch as obviously we



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

have to do here with a fault in the description. It is the beginning of 1 *Henry IV*. The spectator has become acquainted, in the first scene, with the King himself, has seen him in council with his peers, and heard his sorrowful complaints of his undutiful son, upon whose forehead "riot and dishonour" have set their seal. The second act then shows him, the prodigal son, in an excellent humour in the society of his witty boon companion, the fat Sir John Falstaff. (The latter is introduced, like all outstanding figures of Shakespeare, with some opening words which stamp his character, viz., the question, significant of his habit of loafing, and evidently accompanied with a yawn, as to the time of day.) The conversation between the two—their mild reproaches and reflections concerning their respective modes of life and their rosy prospects of continuing this kind of existence in the eventuality of the Prince's accession to the throne—apparently affords a complete justification of the sorrow expressed by the royal father. It is clear that Falstaff, though he is the wittiest of scamps and highwaymen, always remains a robber, and what is hatched and discussed in this scene is nothing less than a robbery punishable by the gallows, even though the Prince in the last minute cautiously avoids immediate participation in the crime and prefers, for the sake of a joke, to rob the robbers themselves, assisted by one accomplice—that is to say, in his turn to attack Falstaff and his companions after they have done their work. All this must create the impression in the spectator that the Prince has sold himself body and soul to this dissolute gang. The intention of the poet, however, is otherwise, so he makes him toward the end of the scene speak the monologue :

I know you all, and will a while uphold  
The unyok'd humour of your idleness ;  
Yet herein will I imitate the sun :  
Who does permit the base contagious clouds  
To smother up his beauty from the world,  
That, when he please again to be himself,  
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,  
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Of vapours, that did seem to strangle him.  
If all the year were playing holidays,  
To sport would be as tedious as to work ;  
But when they seldom come, they wish'd-for come,  
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.  
So, when this loose behaviour I throw off,  
And pay the debt I never promised,  
By how much better than my word I am,  
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes ;  
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes,  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill ;  
Redeeming time, when men think least I will.

This monologue is very remarkable. If we were to take it literally it would stamp the Prince's character with the mark of gross hypocrisy, which was certainly not intended. We are astonished to find Prince Hal maintaining that he mixes in the company of the rascals merely in order to make his own virtues shine all the more splendidly afterward. If that were true he would thereby become, as Kreyssig says, " a theatrical young wastrel, who makes a great show of sowing his wild oats in order afterward to create a sensation by his conversion." This, however, is most probably not the fundamental structure of the character. So the critics continue their line of argument by asserting that the Prince must be deceived as to his own nature. Some (Kreyssig) find in his words a certain precociousness peculiar to young people who persuade themselves that their carousing and enjoyment serve a most important political purpose ; and this, according to them, points to a special psychological subtlety in the monologue. Others (Brandes) think that this self-palliating and sophistical speech ought to be recited in a jesting manner, and that the speaker himself does not take quite seriously all the reasons he adduces for his conduct. Brandes evidently is not quite satisfied by this explanation. This is proved by the many additional reasons he brings forward, and in fact there is nothing in the monologue that hints at a jocular intention.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Kreyssig's explanation, on the other hand, is altogether out of the question, because the Prince shows no signs of precocious behaviour anywhere else, and therefore cannot suddenly speak as a precocious youth in this one passage.

Other critics again (Wolff) courageously take the view that here Shakespeare has made a psychological blunder. But wherein lies the error? What is the subjective falsity of the statement? Not that, as has been supposed, it anticipates a development of the action which the speaker cannot know anything of. That the heir-apparent will some time ascend the throne is not improbable; that even in the midst of his more than merry life he does not abandon the good intention of proving himself worthy of his station is not an idea that could surprise us; nor should we have any objection if in his monologue he were merely referring, by means of an 'aside,' to these things. What does make us begin to feel critical, however, is the fact that here he so completely denies any community of thought or feeling with his accomplices, whereas we have just witnessed with what genuine pleasure he has plunged into this life. Yet even this is not the ultimate incongruity, for if he does not feel at one with them in his soul, he has a right to express this feeling. The mistake, however, consists in the fact that he attributes his behaviour to an obviously false motive, and consequently does not excuse himself, but goes so far as to consider himself entitled to praise and glory by his behaviour, compares himself with great self-complacency to the sun, and lays stress on the profound wisdom of his conduct. By this means he comes to see things in a false moral light, and interprets his loafing about with highwaymen, committing adultery with the hostess, etc., as meritorious acts. Another, wishing to judge him leniently and extenuatingly, might say such things of him, but not he himself. And, indeed, one of the vassals actually tries to comfort his father, Henry IV, by using the curious simile that his son is acting only like one who tries to become acquainted with the indecent words of a foreign language in order not to use them; but this too is a mistake, for the Prince obviously uses the indecent words with great

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

enjoyment; still, in the mouth of an indulgent observer this conception appears quite comprehensible.

The fact is, this monologue has to be regarded not as an individual expression, imagined as being psychologically consistent with the character of the speaker, and perhaps even as intended to show him as deceiving himself, but as an explanatory remark, meant to be true to fact and belonging to the exposition, a statement which might have been put into the mouth of some one speaking as Chorus. That this interpretation of the action by the author does not appear quite unexceptionable from the point of view of the real facts is due to his partiality to the Prince, *or rather to his loyalty, his respect for the idea of kingship, which makes him consider it desirable to add some embellishing touches to the conception of the action.*

This procedure cannot surprise us when we see that in other passages also he appears somewhat biased in his moral views in regard to this royal figure. The scene in question is at the end of the play, the second part of *Henry IV* (V, v). Prince Hal has ascended the throne as king and has been crowned in Westminster Abbey. Falstaff, with his band of shady and disreputable characters, who have been joined by the wholly besotted Justice Shallow, is standing in the street and waiting in feverish impatience for the coronation procession, which approaches to the sound of trumpets. When the King comes in sight the group of his old accomplices cheer him with shouts of joy. Falstaff cries out in the greatest excitement: "God save thy grace, King Hal! my royal Hal!" And again: "God save thee, my sweet boy!" But the King, cold as ice, turns away:

My lord chief justice, speak to that vain man.

*Ch. Just.* Have you your wits? know you what 'tis you speak?

*Fal.* My king! my Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!

*King.* I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers;  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!  
I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;  
But, being awake, I do despise my dream.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Make less thy body, hence, and more thy grace ;  
Leave gormandising ; know, the grave doth gape  
For thee thrice wider than for other men :—  
Reply not to me with a fool-born jest ;  
Presume not, that I am the thing I was ;  
For heaven doth know, so shall the world perceive,  
That I have turn'd away my former self ;  
So will I those that kept me company.  
When thou dost hear I am as I have been,  
Approach me ; and thou shalt be as thou wast,  
The tutor and the feeder of my riots :  
Till then, I banish thee, on pain of death,—  
As I have done the rest of my misleaders,—  
Not to come near our person by ten mile.  
For competence of life, I will allow you,  
That lack of means enforce you not to evil :  
And, as we hear you do reform yourselves,  
We will—according to your strength, and qualities—  
Give you advancement. Be it your charge, my lord,  
To see perform'd the tenor of our word.

2 *Henry IV*, V, v

A great number of Shakespearean critics find here a truly dignified regal behaviour. From a human point of view, however, this conduct of the King is open to very grave objections. In our opinion it introduces a positively wicked trait of hypocrisy into his portrait. We know the self-assured, clear-sighted Henry too well not to smile when he represents himself as the poor victim of seduction and Falstaff as the cunning "tutor and the feeder of my riots"; moreover, he must have known better than to promise Falstaff advancement, according to his strength and qualities, if he reforms himself. Wherein else lie the "strength and qualities" of good old Sir John but in the gambols of his wit, in the merry mood produced by copious draughts of sack? Above all we must ask, How can Henry address a philippic of this kind to Falstaff without perceiving that thereby he also condemns himself? "How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!" Had Falstaff no white hairs before? Well, then, Prince Hal ought either to have made this discovery earlier and been induced by it

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

to prefer honest men for his associates, or, as he was so late in recognizing the ugliness of vice, to have been a little ashamed of his late recognition. That he should separate himself from his old accomplices is necessary; that he leaves them no hope is unavoidable. But there is no occasion for preaching morality to them, even if we consider that the events of the time immediately preceding had been leading the Prince farther and farther away from his old friends.

But what can have induced Shakespeare to show the King in this light? The attempt has been made, among others, to explain it (Bradley) by stating that he is moved by a sudden outburst of anger to cast aside other considerations. But if Shakespeare had wanted to represent an outburst of anger, he would certainly not have done it in the quiet flow of ideas contained in these twenty-five lines of reflection. To make momentary moods responsible for an action instead of the character itself is seldom productive of good critical results; in the case of a character like Henry V, who is anything but a man of moods, it is quite out of the question. Or was it Shakespeare's intention to give a touch of hardness to this character? Henry's conduct elsewhere does not warrant such an assumption. The King is certainly not meant to do anything reprehensible. The real reason we shall find to be the same here as that which led to the indulgent representation of his tavern life given in the monologue. It is the poet's loyalty and respect for the idea of kingship. The King's anointed person towers so high above people like Falstaff that, in spite of all that has happened, his soul has nothing in common with them. Therefore his behaviour may not be judged by the same standards as theirs.

We see a touch of partiality, of a deliberate desire to overlook the King's faults, in the fact that the poet allows him the right of speaking thus severely. He who refers, for the sake of comparison, to the discussion of the moral position of the King given in *Henry V* (IV, i) will no longer be astonished at this peculiarity of the poet.

In all these instances we see how the dramatist, by giving

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the fullest, if not always the correct, reasons for the action, aims at leaving the audience in no uncertainty as to the inner nature of the chief characters. Where there is a possibility of doubt arising he likes to remove it. It is very characteristic that he does this not merely in monologues, but also by means of 'asides' and communications made directly for the spectator's sake, e.g., in *Othello*, in the scene (II, i) where Desdemona with her attendants has reached Cyprus before her husband and is anxiously waiting on the beach for his ship, which has been delayed by the storm. She tries to while away the time by getting Iago to make smart and witty conversation. In order, however, that the audience may not misunderstand this and take her for a superficial or frivolous woman she allows them to look behind her mask, saying :

I am not merry ; but I do beguile  
The thing I am by seeming otherwise.

Here notice once more how consistently primitive was Shakespeare's art-form. A modern dramatist, instead of giving this 'aside,' would represent Desdemona as absent-minded and inattentive. The Elizabethan playgoer, however, is accustomed to this method. We may mention the passage in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* where Abigail, forced by her father to dissimulate, turns to the audience with the naïve aside : " I smile against my will."

We should also observe how carefully in *King Lear* Shakespeare has, so to speak, erected danger signals in order to prevent people from straying into 'blind paths.' According to his habit of throwing light on his most important figures, if possible, by the very first words they speak in the exposition, he introduces, for example, Cordelia with the aside : " What shall Cordelia do ? Love, and be silent " (I, i). When the blind Gloucester imagines himself to be standing on the top of Dover Cliff and is preparing for the leap which, as he hopes, will put an end to all his sufferings, his son, who has contrived the pious deception, turns to the audience with the explanation :

Why I do trifle thus with his despair  
Is done to cure it.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

And when the night of madness falls on Lear's mind the spectator is informed in good time of the view he has to take of the subsequent speeches by the statement : " My wits begin to turn " (III, ii).

*One must keep in view the simplicity of these means and the circumstances which called for them in order to see in a proper light the exegetical art of those critics who credit the poet with being capable of giving motives for actions which he does not mean to be true to the facts. But we shall not be justified either in regarding expressly stated reasons as requiring to be supplemented except in cases of urgent need, i.e., unless it is imperatively demanded by the facts.* An instance proving this thesis is Ophelia's madness, which numerous critics trace back to the double blow of Hamlet's desertion and her father's death. Shakespeare, however, makes the King state expressly (IV, v, 76) that this clouding of her mind is due to her sorrow for her father's death. None of the bystanders says a word about the relations which Hamlet has broken off being the cause. This allows us to conclude with certainty how the dramatist wished the occurrence to be explained.

Occasionally this excessive ingenuity of the critics leads to a really amusing confusion of art and reality. In *Hamlet*, the Queen, after the exciting scene in which Polonius has been murdered in her chamber, informs her husband how the affair has taken place, and ends her report by saying that Hamlet now " weeps for what is done " (IV, i, 27). This line has seemed to many, not without reason, to be questionable from a psychological point of view. With Hamlet's acerbity of character and his own statements regarding the deed, his weeping on this occasion does not seem to be very compatible. *Since, however, statements as to events which are brought to the spectator's ears, and which he is incapable of verifying from what he himself has witnessed or from the words of trustworthy persons, are generally to be taken at their face value (cf. above, p. 66 seq., on the principle of the objective appropriateness of dramatic testimony), the only question we shall be able to raise here will be whether this passage contains a psychological error or not. But what are*



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

we to think of a conception like that of Bradley (p. 168) and others who are of opinion that the Queen may have seen Hamlet weep, *but misinterprets the reason of his tears?* This again is to confuse art with reality. In art, as opposed to reality, all things have their purpose; but what purpose is served by the mention of Hamlet's tears if, in the mentioning, the reason given for them is a false one? Are the audience to puzzle their heads about nothing? In this and similar cases the simplicity of Shakespeare's art has been grossly misunderstood.

2. IMPUTED MOTIVES.—Though the reader may be inclined, in view of the many primitive traits that have been pointed out, to agree that when reasons are given for actions they are generally meant to be true to fact and sufficient, yet he will not be able to suppress one great objection. Ulrici was the first to voice it, when he said (*Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 1868, iii, p. 7): "Shakespeare in many cases leaves it to the spectator to find out for himself the motives of the decisions, the behaviour, the actions, and omissions of his characters; for his own part he only hints at them, *or occasionally compels us to guess them from the context.*" He knows quite well that in the last resort the impulses of our willing and doing spring from the innermost core and foundation of our being, so that their true meaning and worth often remains hidden even from ourselves." This last argument, we may say at once, is quite erroneous, for we have seen that Shakespeare in this respect, more than in any other, frequently oversteps the limits of realism and stands in strict contradiction to reality (*cf.* p. 59 *seq.*). The observation in itself, however, is quite correct: Shakespeare in innumerable instances supplies no motive for the behaviour of his characters, in contrast to the 'asides' already mentioned, *e.g.*, the explanation given by Desdemona of her real state of mind or the passages quoted from *King Lear*. He has no 'aside'—to take only a few important examples—explaining why Hamlet assumes the mask of madness; by no syllable are we informed how the strange attitude he adopts toward Ophelia is to be understood. We seek in vain an

226

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

analysis of Cleopatra's real reasons for fleeing from the battle of Actium and thereby bringing the catastrophe upon her lover. Her behaviour toward him afterward, when she grows taciturn and reserved, is entirely enigmatic for a while ; and similarly in many parts of his dramas we must have recourse to that groping and guessing which gives rise to the numerous differences of opinion which have exercised the sagacity of the critics and made them have recourse to hair-splitting subtleties.

The question now arises, What attitude, speaking quite generally, are we to adopt in the face of this difficulty ?

An extraordinary number of cases may be disregarded from the very beginning by a sane and sober method of interpretation because the difficulties are purely fictitious and the absence of the explanation or the 'aside' is due only to the excessive ingenuity of the critics or to the author's inability to imagine that the events depicted could be understood otherwise than literally. A good example of this, and one which has often been discussed, is Lady Macbeth's fainting fit. It is in the scene (II, ii) in which the terrible secret of the murder of the old King Duncan is brought to light. A mad excitement has seized the discoverers of the deed. A cry of horror reverberates through the house. The faithful Macduff is shaken by a kind of fever ; he has the bells rung, and all hurry to the spot, full of forebodings that something terrible has happened. Macbeth himself seeks to keep pace with the general indignation, and, profiting by the disorder that has ensued, averts the danger to himself by stabbing the chamberlains, upon whom the first suspicion falls. Cunning as he is, he forestalls a reproach for his strange hurry to inflict punishment by immediately afterward condemning the deed as rash and thoughtless. Macduff indeed is puzzled for a moment. "Wherefore did you so?" Macbeth starts upon a wordy explanation of how he has allowed himself to be carried away by his indignation at the horrible crime. All are standing around and looking at him. It is the first great test whether the hideous plan has succeeded. A silence most uncomfortable for the guilty persons falls upon the gathering. At this

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

moment Lady Macbeth groans: "Help me hence." Macduff is the first to see that she is about to faint and cries out: "Look to the lady!"

The King's sons are too much shaken and excited to pay attention to this incident; they are exchanging a few words as to the next steps they will have to take. Nor does Macbeth himself take any notice of his wife. Banquo alone sees her swooning and takes up Macduff's warning cry: "Look to the lady!" (Evidently the stage direction to take the unconscious woman out which was added later on was accidentally omitted in the original text.)

Now what is there that is liable to be misunderstood in the whole incident? It is true that the development of Lady Macbeth's character as a whole presents certain difficulties. Whether the unique strength of will which shows her at the very outset as a "virtuoso of crime" without a trace of scruples or mental struggle, whether the fearful brutality and depravity which in the first scenes make her think lightly of the crime, are altogether compatible with the later disintegration of her inner nature by the overwhelming strain of forcibly suppressed stirrings of conscience has occasionally been disputed with arguments well worthy of consideration (*cf.* Rümelin, p. 72; Kreyssig, p. 155). To these the sceptic might perhaps add the observation that in various cases Shakespeare appears especially naïve when he tries to depict the way in which evildoers invariably compass their own destruction, as in the prickings of conscience in King Richard III, Claudius, and Enobarbus. Still, no matter whether we regard her personality as credible or not, there can be no doubt that Shakespeare has attempted to endow it from the very outset with traits that more or less visibly betray the underlying and suppressed nature and to show an inner resistance against which she has to struggle in a manner quite different, for example, from his treatment of Richard III or Iago. She would herself, she says, have undertaken the murder of King Duncan

had he not resembled  
My father as he slept,

II, ii, 12

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

thereby showing that she is more hardened in her own imagination than in reality. That she must really, in spite of her devilish words, put a strong pressure upon herself in order to be capable of the inhuman deed is further shown by the fact that she nerves herself before the deed by an unusually deep draught—that is, she has to get up Dutch courage. Yet she has her nerves far more under control than Macbeth himself. The progress of the action, however, shows that she has overtaxed them. Now, with this fainting fit, her nerves fail her for the first time. She has driven Macbeth, as his evil genius, farther on the way he had taken, has prevented him by means of scorn and derision from turning back, and tried to infuse her strength of will into him. Now the deed has been done. Now that she must leave Macbeth to himself before strangers how will he manage to carry through his part? Will he not, who finds it so difficult to retain the proper mask in his excitement, break down and thereby prematurely throw up the game? The tremendous agitation of the sleepless night of the murder, in conjunction with this oppressive tension, proves too much for her. She goes through the same kind of experience as Portia, the wife of Brutus, who also at the beginning of her enterprise was energy itself ("Stronger than her sex"), but afterward in the crisis has to struggle hard in order not to faint (*Julius Caesar*, II, iv). She breaks down. It is clear that this is quite a natural thing for a woman to do.

The expositors, however, have from the very beginning regarded this explanation as far too simple. They found that the swooning of this fiendish woman was merely a clever trick for diverting attention from her husband in his difficult position, especially as she feared that he, with his unhappy awkwardness of speech, would not be able to master the situation. This opinion is still widely held (*cf.* Wolff, ii, p. 229). The supreme achievement in Shakespearean exegesis is the view of Vischer, who (ii, p. 2) declares both sides to be in the right—an inherent impossibility. According to him, "Lady Macbeth's intention is merely to pretend that she is fainting, but she really does faint, because after

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

all she cannot bear as much as she thought she could. Most interpreters here simply assume deception. I am convinced, however, that Shakespeare intends us to understand it in both ways. She simulates a fainting fit and finds it easy to simulate, because she actually is near fainting." But "ay and no too is no good divinity," as we are told in *King Lear*; such a power of reconciling the two things requires supernatural gifts. The ordinary mortal is puzzled to understand how Vischer can infer such a complicated mental process from the four words of Lady Macbeth: "Help me hence, ho!" This criticism applies to the very kind of theory that regards this swoon as a piece of simulation: *who among the audience is in a position to ascertain that this fainting fit is not genuine?* Bradley (p. 486), although on the whole rather sceptical, quite seriously deliberates the possibility of the actors getting directions from the author as to how to make the audience understand that the fainting fit is only simulated. But even if one never loses sight of the extremely primitive traits the Elizabethan drama was capable of showing, still, the idea of a Lady Macbeth who, in the very act of fainting, by means of a wink to the pit gives the audience a clue to the proper understanding of the incident strikes us as somewhat ludicrous.

The case is typical of the failure of the critics to understand Shakespeare's art-form. If he had intended Lady Macbeth to simulate unconsciousness, a possibility which is, of course, quite conceivable considering her character, we should have had some remark, before or after, to inform the audience. As there is no such information there is no longer any doubt that the audience took the incident for a mere representation of fact, in accordance with the poet's intention. The contrary conclusion is practically impossible.

The passages, however, where subtle meanings are thus read into Shakespeare so as to distort the character of his art are innumerable. The occurrence side by side of primitive and advanced elements in his works proves an irresistible temptation to his interpreters to look for hidden

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

meanings and connexions. This can be well illustrated by means of a comparison which has already been used on a previous occasion. Shakespeare's work in many respects creates the impression of a modern castle, in the construction of which the foundations and walls of an ancient fortress have been used. Whoever enters this castle without the necessary knowledge of its history cannot be convinced that this or that piece of the old masonry has *not* a hidden meaning ; he is continually suspecting secret passages and unforeseen connexions in it. So we find the most primitive elements of Shakespeare's art again and again interpreted from the standpoint of modern thought, a procedure apparently justified by the more developed form of other parts of his work. Wherever, as a result of such causes, the logical continuity of the action has been interrupted an interpreter fixes upon the weak spot and weaves around it a network of over-subtle psychological speculations without paying heed to the fact that in such cases dramatic elements frequently appear which belong to an older and more primitive time than that of Shakespeare, and which need not necessarily have been endowed by him with a new meaning.

It is clear, however, that not all the difficulties in this department are imaginary. What really makes the subjective method of explanation so easy is the fact, mentioned at the beginning of this section, that Shakespeare assigns no motive for action in many instances where an explanation is at least as desirable as, for instance, in the case mentioned above, where Cordelia allows us to look into her heart by means of an 'aside.' Why does he vary so much in his methods, in the one case carefully enlightening the audience, in the other leaving them in the dark ? We shall have to explain this contradiction chiefly by assuming that Shakespeare is so completely wrapped up in his subject that he never becomes conscious of the possibility of there being any difficulties for his audience. In order to understand this state of mind we must try to realize his method of working. We then realize that he works so much by instinct that he is, so to speak, no longer able

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

to see the action from the outside and is by no means the best interpreter of his own creations. He has ceased to exist outside of them. It is this quality, as we all know, which makes him capable of his unique achievement. So fully and intensely does he embody the individual personalities that the expression of every mental activity corresponds in the minutest details to the specific combination of qualities in the stage character and the whole personality is recognizable in the expression, just as the various strings of a musical instrument are present in the sound it emits and as all the constituent elements of the incandescent body are contained in the rays of light sent out by it. In this manner arise the inimitably delicate individual shades of difference.

Moreover, his thought, soaring on the wings of the romantic temperament, finds no difficulty in appropriating the most curious and fantastic ideas, the most exceptional mental phenomena, and assimilating them to a degree which is unattainable by one gifted with a less powerful imagination. He is not only endowed with the faculty of a man like Thackeray, who is able to live equally well in the most diverse souls of men and women, but has the sense of the extraordinary which accounts for his success in making his characters what they are. Lastly, the various directions of his dramatic activity are determined as much by the unique rapidity of his thought processes as by the intensity and many-sidedness of his creative power. A convincing proof of his habit of grasping things with lightning-like rapidity is the unparalleled wealth of imagery which distinguishes his style. His mind is an inexhaustible source of metaphors. His thought, working swiftly as a weaver's shuttle, is constantly establishing associations between the most diverse ideas, so that our slower minds frequently find it difficult to follow his. This astonishing rapidity of his thought taxes our power of attention to the utmost degree, and sometimes obscures his style by what we might call a certain mental shorthand, contrasting strongly with those long passages where he is clearness itself. We can therefore easily understand

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

that the peculiarities just described occasionally prevent him from perceiving that the motives are not so readily intelligible that we can at once find our way through them. And as his style now and then undeniably skips and omits a link in the chain of reasoning, so his mind occasionally rushes on in its flight, especially where it is following an action taken over ready-made from the original source without itself becoming conscious of, or rendering intelligible to us, the psychological foundations of the action which it has unconsciously assimilated and which it presupposes as given. An 'aside' would in many cases of this kind be very serviceable.

There are cases, however, in which we may be inclined to think that Shakespeare's method of work has been less inspired and intensive than that just described; for example, in the dramatization of certain incidents of the Antony and Cleopatra story. There the downfall of the hero is brought about by Cleopatra's flight from the naval battle of Actium; this scene is therefore in a certain sense the culminating point of the drama. At all events it is the turning-point of the destinies of all the persons concerned in the action. For this very reason a modern poet would have devoted all his efforts to the elucidation of this event. Shakespeare himself in other historical pieces, as, for instance, in *Julius Caesar*, is careful to assign motives to actions attended by such important consequences. Here, however, we look in vain for a word of explanation. Shakespeare follows Plutarch in his description, and Plutarch is as good as silent on this point. He says scarcely a word about the causes of Cleopatra's treacherous behaviour, and the only noteworthy attempt at giving something like a reason for her action is found in the fragment of a sentence, occurring in the account of Antony's following Cleopatra, which says that she "had already begun to overthrow him." In Shakespeare's play we are surprised to see no signs of the dramatist's having exerted his mental powers in any way in order to find out a deeper reason for the incident. It is simply accepted as a fact. Afterward, when Cleopatra is reconciled to



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Antony, the deed itself is passed over with a single short reference :

Forgive my fearful sails, I little thought  
You would have follow'd.

III, ix, 54

Many critics have given a more or less carefully reasoned explanation of Cleopatra's behaviour. Wetz, for example (p. 470 *seq.*), elaborately discusses the impelling forces in her mind during this flight. He finds them in a not very plausible mixture of caprice, frivolousness, calculation, sudden loss of courage in consequence of feminine weakness, and inborn cowardice. But one is quite justified in doubting whether Shakespeare ever really thought of these motives, which may or may not have been correctly deduced from the complex whole of the character. It is much more probable that we shall have to take a far simpler view of the facts and attribute them to his infinitely varied manner of working, which makes him in one case identify himself most vividly with his characters in the way described above, so that he may be said to participate in the faintest vibrations of their souls, and in another impels him to dramatize their actions almost like a composer who occasionally passes negligently over a passage of the text that he is setting, content with only half understanding it. Certain very noticeable weaknesses of a number of passages even in his greatest works can hardly be explained in any other way. Whoever wishes to see what a mass of uncritical and undigested stuff, what internal contradictions and conflicts, may be found in a dramatization by Shakespeare of an historical theme should take up *Henry VIII*, with all its hopeless and irreconcilable discrepancies. In this play the trait we are speaking of undeniably appears in its crudest form. The want of clearness in such cases as these is not due to the poet's living too intensely in his subject and his figures, but rather to the contrary reason. Yet, in spite of such discrepancies, so much has been made clear: *the poet never has the consciousness or the intention of leaving anything obscure.* The mistake is committed by many even of the latest English editors (of the "Arden"

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

edition, etc.) of assuming that he purposely leaves many things unexplained. *In spite of all appearances to the contrary, his art remains the art of clear and precise statements. The more important currents of thought as a rule are not intentionally suppressed, and should therefore not be supplied by the interpreter; the necessary additions must be left to the audience.* As regards this last point, he shows clearly enough in the numerous primitive traits of his art with which we have become acquainted how consistently he tries to adapt his drama to the understanding of his audience. *The less complicated and the more natural, therefore, the solution of the difficulties we attempt, the more we endeavour to make the given ideas suffice for the explanation, the fewer the unexpressed ideas we introduce, the greater is the probability that we shall hit upon the correct meaning—that is to say, the meaning intended by Shakespeare himself. We are justified, as a rule, in adding a motive only when no sense results without it. And whether a sense results must be ascertained from the point of view not of our time, but of the Elizabethan age and in connexion with the whole of Shakespeare's dramatic activity. Here the necessity of literary research comes in. Little good can result from even the most sagacious verdict of the mere amateur.* In many cases the solution is most easily found in the materials which he used, and consequently a good knowledge of his original sources is quite indispensable for the correct understanding of his train of thought. There are several passages in *Hamlet* which are good examples of what we have just said; e.g., the best explanation of Hamlet's strange resolve to assume the mask of madness is to be found in the account given in *Fratricide Punished* (cf. p. 148, p. 169 seq.), and his curious behaviour in Ophelia's room, where he appears

with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head : his stockings foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle  
Pale as his shirt,

and tests Ophelia by means of pantomime, will be most appropriately interpreted by those critics who simply

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

hold the view that it serves to give the audience the first intimation of Hamlet's simulated madness, of which he has spoken just after the appearance of the ghost. Hamlet has left us in the preceding scene after stating his firm resolution to put on "an antic disposition." When we now learn of such behaviour on his part our first and most natural idea is to explain it by what Hamlet has already told us, and a spectator of Shakespeare's time would hardly have taken any other view.

## THE QUESTION OF SYMBOLICAL CHARACTERS

THE CHARACTERS IN "THE TEMPEST."—Shakespeare's characters, from the beginning to the end of his creative activity, are so manifestly realistic that no one has seriously attempted to look behind them for a hidden and more general meaning, though a tendency in this direction is discernible in some critics. Wolff, for instance (ii, p. 231 *seq.*), believes that all sorts of mysterious allegories are to be detected in *King Lear*. The scene where the blind Gloucester wanders about guided by his son Edgar, who has escaped his pursuers by pretending to be mad, represents, according to Wolff, a piece of profound parabolic wisdom which could not have been embodied in a better form by any Indian thinker. Unfortunately, however, he withholds from us what truth, in his opinion, is to be expressed by the image of the "blind man being led on by the madman," which image, moreover, rests on a totally false assumption, because Edgar is not mad at all and does not even pretend to be so while guiding his father. The violent distortion of the facts in order to fit the theory which is required in this case seems to be unnecessary in *The Tempest*, where apparently a symbolical interpretation is possible.

Shakespeare's *Tempest* in many respects holds a distinctive place among his works. This importance is not diminished by the fact that the drama must be placed by the side of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* as what we may call a wedding play, owing its origin to a celebration of nuptials or a betrothal at the house of some great magnate.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

This purpose is clearly indicated by the hymeneal masque of the fourth act.

For a play of this sort a love-affair which finds its crowning point in a wedding is indispensable. But something else has to be added. Already in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* he had accentuated the especially festive character of the play by introducing the supernatural in its most attractive form. The occasion which by its very nature banishes all tragic thoughts and suggests the idea that friendly spirits might attend to fulfil all good wishes had induced him to tie the knot of his intrigue but lightly, and involved the assistance of the fairies for its disentangling. Something of the same kind, he thought, would be the fittest subject for this occasion also : love in distress, trials of faith, and apparitions. The action, however, as in nearly all other cases, he did not invent himself. It is difficult to decide whether he used a tale or an old play as his material. The shortness of the action might be adduced as an argument in favour of the tale ; yet his preference for the ready-made dramatic form renders it more probable that he utilized an older dramatic work.

The nucleus of the action is as follows : A prince who is an adept in magic is expelled from his possessions, and comes to an island where he is enabled through the assistance of a kindly spirit, made subject to him by his magic art, to continue his life-work of educating his daughter. One day he forces his enemies, who are by chance brought near his island, to land on its shore, causing their ship to be wrecked by a tempest. He contrives the meeting of his daughter and the King's son, kindles mutual love in their hearts, and after a short trial of the suitor joins their hands. The others for a while wander aimlessly about the island, plagued and vexed by all kinds of apparitions and exhausted by want ; in the end, however, they learn in whose kingdom they are, receive the injured prince's pardon, and return to their home with him who has given up his magic power.

This fable is based on a novel which is found again in a different form in the contemporary Spanish literature,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

and of which a dramatic version, greatly modified, was made by Ayrrer, the Nuremberg poet. The constituent elements of this play are frequently met with, and occupy a considerable space in the older romantic drama, especially the plays of chivalry, of which unfortunately we possess but scanty remains (*cf.* p. 20), and which probably in all cases relied strongly on magic. A royal magician, his beautiful daughter, a prince who woos her and must undergo every conceivable kind of trial in order to attain his end, a familiar spirit, people who by magic are bereft of their senses, enchanted valleys and forests, songs that induce sleep, food that is suddenly spirited away—all this was found by Shakespeare already on the stage, perhaps even in the play he used, as it had long ago been transferred from the romance of chivalry to the theatre. And as we also find discovered in the romance<sup>1</sup> a devil's island, a wicked woman who has given birth to a monster who reigns over it, to say nothing of ships moved and tempests called up by magic force, it is not impossible that a very slight foreshadowing of the figure of Caliban too existed in the poet's model.

Shakespeare worked up the whole in his usual manner. Though he interwove it closely with the recent fabulous happenings in the *Sea Venture*, yet he did it in such a way that the diversity of origin of the material can easily be ascertained. The differences are most clearly discernible in the geographical situation of the play. The events of the main action are obviously located in the Mediterranean. The Spanish novel also expressly mentions the Adriatic as the scene. Prospero, the exiled duke, who in a leaking boat reaches the lonely island, comes from Milan; Sycorax, the witch, Caliban's mother, is brought over from Algiers, and the magician's enemies pass his island on their way from Tunis to Naples. This situation is hinted at in the play by the reference to its being the ancient Carthage. In spite of all this, the spectator is led to imagine that he finds himself on an island of the New World, and when Ariel

<sup>1</sup> *Cf.* de Perott, *Romantic Rev.*, v; *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, xlii, p. 308, and xlviii, p. 231.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

is sent out to fetch dew from "the still vex'd Bermoothes" these must be supposed to be somewhere in the neighbourhood. Other things beside these point to a fusion of different materials. Ariel, for instance, was obviously conceived in the first place as merely a spirit who reluctantly renders all kinds of services, who has the power of appearing as a beautiful woman, and so on, but must be held well in check and treated with severity. In Shakespeare's hands, however, he is gradually transformed into a roguish fairy (*cf.* p. 134). As contrasted with him the figure of Caliban, though not entirely free from contradictions, is more of a piece. That he was a later conception is also shown by the fact that there is hardly a trace of any close personal relation between him and Ariel.

Caliban evidently belongs to the part of the action for which Shakespeare is more personally responsible. In it we may also include the subsidiary action in the group of the shipwrecked persons. These are the King of Naples, Sebastian, his brother, Gonzalo, his councillor, the usurper of Milan, and two courtiers. While wandering about the island they are sent to sleep by Ariel. Only the usurper and the King's brother remain awake; the former tempts Sebastian to murder the King and Gonzalo with his assistance, and only the timely awakening of the threatened people by Ariel frustrates the perfidious design.

One cannot say that the introduction of this subsidiary action is a happy one from the point of view of the whole dramatic development. Though the story has been praised as particularly "transparent and well-arranged" (Kreyssig, in accordance with Drake), we are unable to see what plan is followed by the subsidiary action which Ariel introduces, as it afterward stops dead and has no influence on the final issue of the main action. Moreover, it is carelessly treated in itself, inasmuch as the expiation and repentance of the sinners in the end is dealt with in the usual light manner of the flimsily constructed comedy-endings (see p. 199). We have only the testimony of the generous Prospero (and maybe of their own gestures) to show that they are actuated by inward contrition, for from

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

their own lips we have no word indicative of such a feeling. On the contrary, the moment they have recovered their power of speech they begin again their old jibes and witticisms.

We see therefore that in this subsidiary action Shakespeare's genius does not appear at a very high level, all the less because the motive here is essentially the same as that of the wonderful low-comedy action of Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban, who also want to assassinate a sleeping person. This doubling of motives is generally regarded by critics as due to a significant intention, and none of them dares to find, *e.g.*, in the family conflict in the house of Gloster, by which Shakespeare has supplemented the story of Lear, anything but a parallel to the main action, chosen with a deep and subtle artistic purpose. This critical procedure, however, is open to the objection that it fails to understand correctly the peculiar character of Shakespeare's creative activity. It is certainly no mere accident that Shakespeare hardly ever freely invents an action, but with very few exceptions—as, for instance, in *Love's Labour's Lost*—constructs his edifice in accordance with some already existing ground-plan. It is obvious that his imagination is not of the kind that delights in the development and complication of connected motives. This deficiency is part of his artistic individuality, as we have already seen elsewhere (*cf.* p. 231 *seq.*), and it is a necessary aspect of the emotional trend of his creative activity which makes him inclined at all times impulsively to do his best and to begin building at once in marble and placing one stone upon the other rather than spend a lot of time over the dry calculations of a ground-plan and the erection of a scaffolding. Therefore he is apt to hold on to a motive which he has once found, and generally manages—at least in *King Lear*, though hardly in the very monotonous *Love's Labour's Lost*—to make a virtue of necessity.

A similar relaxing of the inventive power, as shown by the scarcity of the motives and the occasional slowing down of the action to a dead stop (II, i), is perceptible in



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

the unequal contributions made by the various persons to the action. This is the direct contrary of what we admire, for example, in *Othello*, where every character is placed at the point where it becomes necessary for the continued flow of events. Take, for instance, the courtiers Adrian and Francisco ; they speak only just enough to prevent a clever expositor from supposing that they have lost their speech in consequence of the excitements of the shipwreck ; for the rest, they are nothing more than 'supers.'

But though in these points Shakespeare's dramatic art, in the proper sense of the word, is not conspicuously exhibited in this play, and though the same may be said of the exposition, which here is quite uncommonly awkward for Shakespeare, yet in other more important features of the piece we find some of the most brilliant achievements of his art. Some of them do not concern us here—for example, the magic atmosphere of the play, or things like the unique songs of Ariel, with their mixture of roguish grace and deep, tender feeling for nature. It is otherwise with the characters themselves and their relations to one another.

Duke Prospero we get to know from his own account of his previous history and from his intercourse principally with his daughter and Ariel. Only slight evidence is yielded by self-characterization and reflection of the character in the minds of others. Shakespeare evidently found in his original source a wise, serene old man—this is also the way in which the Spanish tale delineates its hero. Hence Shakespeare makes a figure of him which we can hardly describe, with Max Koch, as his "ideal of ripe manhood," because it obviously stands already on the threshold of old age. ("My old brain is troubled," IV, i, 159. "My Milan, where every third thought shall be my grave," V, i, 311.) A truly royal and dignified personage is presented to us, whose previous experiences, as related by him, in conjunction with the impressions which we now receive of him, have caused the interpreters to assume some strong inner development, which, however,

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

is not hinted at by a single word. The Prospero of the previous history had buried himself in his magic books, and thereby failed to observe how his brother was undermining his throne. He had been driven from his home and had allowed himself to be thrown into a small boat, abandoned to the sea, weeping, and kept alive only by the thought of his little child. The Prospero whom we meet now makes the most practical use imaginable of his magic art, exacts prompt service from his attendants, does not hesitate to punish them, is resolved and firm, and knows how to seize the proper moment for action. He is a most careful father to his daughter, a considerate master to Ariel, severe against the brutal Caliban, humane toward the repentant enemies, full of experience and wisdom.

Yet in spite of all these fine qualities there is a lack in this figure of something which distinguishes all other Shakespearean heroes. He is destitute of the infinite wealth of human traits, the interplay of qualities which gives such a magic life to the poet's other great figures, which makes every statement of theirs glitter in a thousand different colours. Prospero, on the other hand, has a certain dryness; he does not impress the critical observer with quite the greatness he might be supposed to possess. His mysterious art is not allied with corresponding mysterious depths of his nature. On the contrary, he unintentionally appears in the light of a schoolmaster, constantly giving Ariel 'good marks,' and, with an undertone of self-satisfaction, speaking perpetually in a most consequential manner of his own capabilities and his own knowledge (IV, i, 123). The same trait is shown when his judicial severity against Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban betrays a considerable admixture of personal spite, and when in his admonitions addressed to his daughter he lets himself be induced by pedagogic reasons to be somewhat unscrupulous in regard to truth, telling her that Ferdinand is only a Caliban compared with other men. The schoolmaster also appears when he addresses warnings to Ferdinand concerning Miranda's chastity which are obviously quite unnecessary, and above all when his

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

treatment of Caliban, owing to the forced solemnity of his behaviour, manifests a curiously un-Shakespearean lack of humour which, in view of the superior power at his disposal, reminds us of a teacher who is put in a temper by the recalcitrance of a degraded and disrespectful schoolboy. For this reason we may consider the attempts he makes to educate Caliban—which, of course, end in failure—and the instructions he gives to his daughter Miranda as harmonizing perfectly with his real nature. It is significant that no doubt can be entertained as to the more or less unintentional introduction of these traits into his character. Still, the fact that they were introduced makes us disinclined to believe that Shakespeare was in full command of his artistic powers when he created the work. In our days the skill of the actor frequently helps us to get over these difficulties. When, for example, Wüllner's Prospero is praised (*Berliner Tageblatt*, 1918, No. 469) for revealing "mental superiority, faint humour, and *demoniac temperament*," we must indeed admit that these traits have been evolved from the general conception of the character, but that they have not found their proper expression in the poet's presentment of it.

Miranda too holds a distinctive place among Shakespeare's female characters. Though she is made to occupy the central position of the action, and attracts a great part of the interest to herself, her portrait shows fewer characteristic traits than that of any other Shakespearean heroine. Stress is laid principally upon her compassionate and gentle feeling, which goes out at the very beginning to the victims of the shipwreck, and which again appears when her father tells her of his banishment from Milan. A warm feeling of gratitude for Gonzalo's goodness which impulsively arises in her upon her father's mentioning his generous assistance reveals the nobility of her instincts. For the rest, however, she is all naïvety and, according to the poet's intention, a complete child of nature. The first man whom she meets she takes for a spirit; she immediately loses her heart to him, and feels more than pity for him, and for this reason she does not hesitate even to be disloyal

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

for a moment to her father in order to help him. She weeps with joy at finding her affection reciprocated in equal strength, proffers herself in perfect innocence as his wife, and is henceforth filled with loving devotion to him to the exclusion of every other feeling. If the poet had wished to paint a Yarico, an indigenous child of nature of the New World, he could not have chosen any other traits, nor could he have managed with fewer. It is easy to see that the poet's endeavour is to avoid disturbing in any way the impression that her heart is an absolutely clean sheet. In the primitive manner of Shakespeare's technique (*cf.* p. 38 *seq.*) his heroine again and again, in referring to her own nature, reveals a consciousness of the idea of innocence which, if taken strictly, would belie her assumed ignorance of evil. She speaks, for instance, of her modesty as "the jewel in my dower" (III, i, 53), and prefaces her wooing by a personal touch which in reality would be possible only in the mouth of another person: "Prompt me, plain and holy innocence."

So the modern reader, at any rate, is inclined to discover something false in the picture, since naïvety which recognizes itself for what it is appears to us artificial and simulated. But what we find here is merely that overstepping of the limits of realism in self-characterization with which we have become familiar in other passages. It is true we have also to inquire how far Miranda's statements concerning other things than herself agree with each other. Here too there is much that does not quite coincide with the idea of a child of nature who has grown up like a lily in the field. If we did not know that not every statement in Shakespeare need agree with the character of the speaker (*cf.* p. 96 *seq.*) we should be somewhat astonished to find Miranda, after hearing her father relate the villainies of his brother, giving him the comforting assurance:

I should sin  
To think but nobly of my grandmother :  
Good wombs have borne bad sons.

I, ii, 117

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Nor does a statement like

This  
Is the third man that e'er I saw ; the first  
That e'er I sigh'd for, I, ii, 445

really correspond to the lack of experience which it is meant to reveal. Still, her picture would appear in a false light if these traits were given too much prominence, and all the expositors have willingly included in their verdict Prospero's judgment of her expressed in the words:

Thou shalt find she will outstrip all praise  
And make it halt behind her. IV, i, 11

The only fault they have committed is that they have laid too little stress on the remarkably sketchy character of the drawing. So Miranda has been grouped with the other women of the 'romances,' especially with Perdita of *The Winter's Tale*. But it is precisely this comparison which shows the completely isolated position of Miranda. Perdita also is a child of nature, a king's daughter who has grown up among simple shepherd folk. But she keeps within the limits of realism, and is, moreover, endowed with the whole wealth of personal touches which go to make up a Shakespearean character. She is modest, unassuming, not submissive, however, but independent, full of natural dignity, frank, gay, adroit, sparkling with youthful vivacity, intelligent, with all sorts of carefully cultivated little interests, possessed of that instinctive knowledge of the world which is so truly feminine, profoundly sincere, full of genuine feeling and tender reverence, confident and brave. What an intense and exuberant vitality ! Compared with her, Miranda appears like a silhouette held beside a fully coloured oil-painting. How very few qualities can be predicated of her !

Still less of colour and life is there in Ferdinand's portrait. He may be said to be almost entirely lacking in personal traits. He is the model of the noble cavalier. It is characteristic of him that the first expression that crosses his lips upon espying the mistress of the island is a request

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

to be told how he has to behave in this place. His mind is bent upon proper behaviour. Honour, piety, and the service of his mistress fill his chivalrous heart. For the first of these objects, if necessity requires, he is prepared to draw his sword, the second makes him engage in frequent and devout prayers, but it is the third which wholly occupies him. Love to him is a heavenly dream, sublime ecstasy. He would willingly suffer himself to be imprisoned if he were allowed from his dungeon to see the beloved maiden only once every day. His mistress herself he worships like a goddess. For her sake he submits to what is calculated to lower his dignity most : manual labour. It would appear to him as a disgrace, to which he would prefer death, to allow her to share in his work. She is his mistress *to whom he bends his knee as her vassal* (III, ii, 87).

No passage of the play shows as clearly as this how far in *The Tempest* Shakespeare is removed from his usual manner. Though his idea of the relation of the sexes may not always find expression in the same way, owing to the great variety of the dramatic situations, yet this absolute reversal of the representation given at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*,

Place your hands below your husband's foot,

bears an entirely different stamp from the rest of his work. Here, indeed, we are transported into a truly 'romantic' world, into the atmosphere of the romance of chivalry, in which the lovers at first sight invariably appear to each other as gods. So Miranda says :

I might call him  
A thing divine ; for nothing natural  
I ever saw so noble.

And Ferdinand replies :

Most sure, the goddess  
On whom these airs attend !

And, quite after the pattern of the romance of chivalry,

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

this love is continued as a sublime ecstasy which urges *both of them to do great deeds each for the other's sake, and by undergoing trials to give proof of their being worthy of each other.* It is not thus that the mutual affection in the hearts of Desdemona<sup>a</sup> and the noble Moor grows up. For this kind of love romance they are too realistic and close to the actual affairs of life. Not even Romeo speaks thus to Juliet. •

It is possible that Shakespeare, true to his peculiar manner, has here only elaborated what he had found in his original source, a play deriving immediately from a romance of chivalry. But this would hardly explain, any better than the assumption that he worked upon a novel, the fact that his characterization here falls so visibly short of his usual skill. In so far the allegorical interpreters are justified in seeking a special reason. Thorndike, in his excellent monograph on Beaumont and Fletcher's influence upon Shakespeare,<sup>1</sup> thinks he can find such a reason in the effect these two dramatists have had on his work in the last period of the 'romances,' and he has certainly succeeded in proving that Shakespeare here shows, in common with his two rivals, many features which are not found in any earlier play. The masque-like elements of *The Tempest* especially, the introduction of which is quite naturally and unconstrainedly effected by Prospero's art, the dance round the ghostly banquet and its disappearance, the dances of reapers and nymphs, the spirits appearing as hounds and other things, are items of stage property and scenery which were in great favour with the theatrical management of the time, the skilful employment of which contributed largely to scenic success. Thorndike's statements, however, about Beaumont and Fletcher purposely neglecting their character-drawing and allowing their figures to degenerate into types and Shakespeare's repetition of this fault cannot be regarded as fully convincing and applicable. That the figures in Beaumont and Fletcher's books are not so well executed as in Shakespeare's is due to their inferior skill. On the other

<sup>1</sup> Worcester, Massachusetts, 1901, pp. 140, 163 seq.

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

hand, we have already seen that Shakespeare characterizes, for instance, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* as intimately as any other of his creations. The pale colouring of the principal figures in *The Tempest* we must rather attribute, it seems, to the fact that all the transactions on the enchanted island are represented as some degrees farther removed from reality, less immediate, and more conventional than in Shakespeare's other plays, because they move partly in the realm of the supernatural. The whole of the play is steeped in an atmosphere of solemnity, and solemnity always tends to a more abstract style of expression. This is in no way contradicted by the fact that this style is not kept up throughout, and that the drunken scenes even break up the unity of style in a manner resembling that of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and with a quite similar artistic effect.

In any case, this explains only the way in which the characters were drawn, not their psychological behaviour. We have already seen that in the latter point they depart from Shakespeare's usual manner. Now we cannot fail to recognize that what has been said about the romantic style in which the love affair is developed is really applicable to the whole *motif* of the figure of Miranda: it shows us Shakespeare as a member of an artistic school in which we should not have expected to find him. Thorndike remarks that Miranda is in essence nothing but an unsuccessful copy of the *sentimental* type of Beaumont and Fletcher. We may even go farther than that. The drawing of this figure, if it is intended to be more than the sport of an idle hour, results in a glorification of that kind of innocence which rests on a naïvety due to lack of experience. The conception, however, that nature most splendidly manifests itself in inexperience is characteristic of a conventional and artificial society; in Shakespeare's time it is represented most clearly by the pastoral poets, and is reflected also in the style of Beaumont and Fletcher. As this society grows more and more rotten and, above all, permits itself ever greater licence in the relation of the sexes, its art is more and more merged in an atmosphere



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

of open and secret lasciviousness. Therefore it seeks virtue only outside its own realm.

We read in one passage of Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* :

' as free from ill  
As he whose conversation never knew  
The court or city.

In this literature there is more talk of chastity than is compatible with the thing itself. An instance is afforded by the shepherdesses of Fletcher, who are constantly philosophizing about the value of their virginity. Shakespeare, to whose nature all veiled wantonness is alien, has yet been touched by a breath from that world when in *The Tempest* he makes Prospero again and again impress on Ferdinand not to "break the virgin-knot" of the lovely Miranda before their marriage, and when he finally shows the triumph of their chastity in the innocent game of chess in which they indulge, though left quite alone. A similar, only still more obtrusive, trial of chastity is undergone in Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* by bridegroom and bride when they lie down to sleep side by side on the stage.

It is with astonishment that we see Shakespeare drawn into this circle of ideas, that we find in him a conception which is not quite free from the confusion of false naïvety and naturalness, of inexperience and innocence. Thereby he becomes unfaithful to his own best traditions, which had made the most noble and refined naturalness shine most brightly and steadily amid all the tempests of life ; he apparently adopts a view the last consequence of which he strictly refutes in this very play, replying in the name of common sense to the description of Montaigne's uncivilized ideal state<sup>1</sup> in the same words in which Romeo declares his

<sup>1</sup> " I' the commonwealth I would by contraries  
Execute all things ; for no kind of traffic  
Would I admit ; no name of magistrate ;  
Letters should not be known ; riches, poverty,  
And use of service none ; contract, succession,  
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, wineryard none ;  
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil,  
No occupation ; all men idle, all ;

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

disbelief in the rant about Queen Mab: "Thou dost talk nothing to me" (II, i). So Shakespeare, after all, meets half-way a current which pleased the jaded taste of the ensuing period better than that truthfulness to life which constitutes the undying glory of his real art. Therefore no more cruel, though unintentional, criticism of this achievement is imaginable than the heightening of the unnaturalness contained in it by Davenant and Dryden, who in the version they made of *The Tempest* partnered the young girl who had never seen a man with a young man who had never seen a woman. This added touch at one stroke converts the picture, which Shakespeare's great art in spite of all its unnaturalness had endowed with a delicate grace and an individual life, into a caricature.

All the more brilliantly does Shakespeare's genius shine in the figure of Ariel. It is, indeed, probable that his model was something more than Ayrrer's little demon, but it can hardly have given him more than a faint suggestion for that development and refinement of motives which form so great a part of his artistic work. The original sketch of the figure, which is still faintly discernible beneath the drawing, is evidently a good-natured spirit. Like all spirits he is, at the bottom of his heart, unwilling to serve, and the magician, like all conjurers, must always be reminding him of his contract. But though Shakespeare retains this trait he transforms it into a great longing for freedom, which is not at variance with the pleasure he takes in his duties. Being a mixture of spirit and elemental, Ariel is at home in all elements; he penetrates into the earth, mixes with fire, and dives into the sea. He changes himself into all shapes, from St Elmo's fire to a water-nymph, from a harpy to Ceres. He is always present whenever he is needed, always finds out what it is most urgent to know, keeps good discipline among the lesser spirits—in a word,

And women, too, but innocent and pure . . .  
 . . . treason, felony,  
 Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
 Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth  
 Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,  
 To feed my innocent people." I

II, i

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

he is Prospero's right hand. He shows consideration and tactfulness, reverence and admiration, toward his master, whose orders he carries out as quick as lightning, thoroughly enjoying the exercise of his own powers. At the same time his nature is full of charm' (III, iii, 84), his voice has the sweetest music in it, and his songs reveal a fund of deep poetry. In this embodiment of supreme human qualities there is something *ideally feminine*, suggested by absence of material motives, the harmonious association of incorporeal, tender, and graceful traits with a joyful readiness to serve and help, which is perhaps unconsciously the reason why Ariel throughout appears only in female, never in male, transfigurations.

Many of these features, as well as his decoying people and putting them to sleep, show that there exists a relationship between him and the figure of Puck in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, who combined the traditions of the 'Familiar,' of 'Robin Goodfellow,' and of the teasing imp; and in the course of the play he becomes more and more a tricky spirit and a fairy. So, for instance, when, invisible to all eyes, he stirs up strife among the drunkards by shouting "thou liest" in the midst of their conversation, and so makes them come to blows, he imitates Puck, and the more his term of service approaches its end, the more the drollery of his nature appears. The tone in which he speaks to his master becomes almost extravagantly playful and roguish, like that of a mischievous child, and when finally he is about to acquire his freedom his fancies show him to us as a proper flower-elf who, hardly visible to the naked eye, wants to hide with the bee in cowslip-bells and to sail on the bat's back in pursuit of summer.

Here, as elsewhere (*cf.* p. 137), the fact that the character is composed of ingredients which differ widely in point of origin has not been injurious to the general effect. One trait which perhaps seemed less remarkable to Shakespeare's contemporaries, who were better versed in devilry and witchcraft than we are and knew the ways of spirits forced into the service of men—Ariel's deep yearning for freedom

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

—appears to us nowadays as the real soul and essence of the figure, and is chiefly instrumental in endearing it to us. His blissful joy, too, at being allowed to live with nature could hardly have made any deep impression upon his time, which was not attached to nature by any particularly strong sympathies. The sense of freedom and the sense of nature had first to gain that enormous influence which they have exercised over the thoughts of modern men since the romantic movement before the figure of Ariel could acquire the full charm and attraction which it has for us to-day.

The artistic counterpart of this figure in the play is Caliban. According to his appearance, Caliban—whose name is derived by means of metathesis from Canibal—is really a monster of the sea. His fantastic exterior is adumbrated by some hints contained in the text. His eyes lie deep in his head, he has long claws, is apparently covered with scales all over his body, has arms like fins, and he exhales a penetrating odour of fish. He was probably put by Shakespeare in the place of a less maritime demon who was the son of the witch Sycorax and the devil, and therein the poet was perhaps influenced by a piece of news which dated from about 1597 and mentioned a sea-monster having at its elbows large fins like a fish as the sole inhabitant of the Bermudas Islands ("Arden" edition, p. 170).<sup>1</sup> This figure was elaborated by Shakespeare with especial care. We learn that Caliban, while still young, was on good terms with the newcomer Prospero, consented to be received by the latter in his house and to be educated by him, in return for which he served him as guide on the island, until his beastly nature broke out and a vicious attack on Miranda opened his benevolent master's eyes and turned him into a severe ruler who has now become accustomed to enforce service by means of threats and violence. From that time a profound hatred of Prospero has taken hold of Caliban and fills his whole

<sup>1</sup> A figure similar in some details occurring in the *Icones animalium aquatilis*, which illustrates Gessner's *Book of Fishes* (1560), has been discovered and pointed out by K. Meier, *Neuere Sprachen*, xv, 193.

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

nature, all the more as it is not merely the vindictiveness of one who has been dispossessed, enchained, and, according to his own opinion, ill-treated, but also the deeply rooted opposition of the mean and base to the noble.

It is precisely this, however, that wins for Caliban a higher degree of psychological probability and a more specific personal attraction than the most finished Shakespearean villains. Like Shylock, he lives in a spiritual world of his own, with his own valuations and his own horizon. He has obscure ideas of a Setebos, his mother's god, clearly outlined legal conceptions of his title as rightful owner of the island, does not allow himself to be impressed by the wisdom of Prospero, but in a way finds out its weak point by scornfully turning up his nose at the dependence of the sorcerer upon his magic books, and rejoices at the reluctance with which the spirits serve him. He betrays his sub-human nature when he incites another person to *bite his enemy to death*, but on the other hand he reveals an inner life of his own by listening with rapture to music and telling of the beautiful dreams in which heaven rains down treasures upon him, and which upon awaking he yearns, with childish tears, to renew. There is hardly a touch of Shakespeare's art of characterization which has been applied with more consummate skill than this, which speaks of that peculiar sadness which usually accompanies spiritual deformity. But the slight touch of tragedy which lies in this loneliness, and which is still increased by the open defiance with which in the beginning he faces his master, is quickly lost in the subsequent comic situations. We see him fall into the hands of the half-drunk butler and the jester, who have saved from the shipwreck a cask of liquor which they are discussing. With a simplicity which, however, like the cowardice he shows on this occasion, does not quite agree with his behaviour at the beginning he goes down on his knees before the giver of the supernatural drink, worships him as a god, swears loyalty to him, and courts him with disgusting self-abasement and servility. What began almost like a tragedy now becomes a merry comedy, and

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

we may be sure that nothing in *The Tempest* was so certain to please the audience as the drunken monster, the bawling fish-man, whose previous sulkiness turns under the influence of this heavenly draught to excessive merriment, as he joins the two boon companions from whom, with a quite groundless confidence, he hopes to receive his longed-for freedom. With a certain native shrewdness he feels that one of the two is brave, the other a coward—yet he enormously overrates them in considering them capable of carrying out the murder of his master to which he adroitly and perfidiously incites them. Only when they have promptly allowed themselves to be deflected from their boastfully announced purpose by the variety of glistening apparel which Prospero has intentionally hung up for them are his eyes opened to the stupidity of his adored protectors. Chased by the demon hounds of his angry master, he recognizes too late that he has deceived himself and failed. No comic part in all Shakespeare's works offers such a splendid opportunity to the actors. The self-destruction of the wicked, not always convincingly developed from the character itself in other cases, in this case, without any forcing, becomes an exceedingly fruitful theme of comic action.

2. THE ALLEGED SYMBOLISM.—Though, as we now see, the characters of this piece upon closer examination offer nothing that goes beyond their purpose in the drama, yet a great bulk of expository literature has been produced with the object of discovering a much more profound meaning than that of which we have so far treated. As a rule it starts with Prospero. That the Duke, the powerful magician, speaks with Shakespeare's own voice is apparently taken for granted by most of these expositors and, in their opinion, hardly requires any proof. *The Tempest* is regarded as Shakespeare's last play. Duke Prospero in it bids good-bye to his magic art. What is more natural than to assume that the good-bye to magic is meant to represent Shakespeare's farewell to the theatre? The passage in question is the following famous speech :

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves ;  
And ye that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him  
When he comes back ; you demi-puppets that  
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,  
Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you whose pastime  
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice  
To hear the solemn curfew ; by whose aid—  
Weak masters though ye be—I have bedimm'd  
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,  
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault  
Set roaring war : to the dread rattling thunder  
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
With his own bolt ; the strong-based promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up  
The pine and cedar : graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth  
By my so potent art. But this rough magic  
I here abjure ; and, when I have required  
Some heavenly music,—which even now I do,—  
To work mine end upon their senses, that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

One cannot read these lines, however, without concluding that, if Shakespeare here intended to express himself allegorically, he has made the perception of his meaning unnecessarily difficult to his audience, more difficult than would have been necessary if he had wanted to speak about his art in a veiled manner. To mention only one example : the spirit of medieval subtlety in excogitating allegories would be required to tell us what side of Shakespeare's art we are to understand by the mushrooms produced at night by the fairies. Even if we leave aside all details, however, the central principle of the whole idea is far too vague. "The poet," it is said, for example, by Wolff, "gives back to the elements the genii who for twenty years have been in his service." But what genii are these ? Where do we find Shakespeare, or one of his circle, speaking of his

256

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

dramatic abilities as genii? This conception is quite foreign to that time, and so the identification of dramatic talent with the tricks of fairies is to be regarded as purely arbitrary. The symbolical view further rests on the idea that Shakespeare must in reality have understood something higher by Prospero's magic. Kreyssig was one of the first to find (p. 500) that it can be only "a symbolical garment for the holy service of art and science." But this is surely to credit the beginning of the seventeenth century with the imagination of the century which reads Goethe's *Faust*, and is a gross misunderstanding not only of the specific conception of that period, but of the purely poetic view of things as well. Art and science *in abstracto* were far less interesting to the audience of those days than feats of magic. A magician then was a very serious personage; a magician, however, who bade good-bye to his magic was acting in a quite comprehensible manner, as the intercourse with supernatural spirits is not profitable to man. That Prospero at the end dismisses his spirits is therefore a very natural consequence of the whole situation. That he should do this in solemn words is inevitable, considering the dignity of his character. That his words are filled with a sense of parting is in accordance with Shakespeare's art. We need not dispute, however, whether this sentiment was due to actual experience or not. It is by no means absolutely certain that *The Tempest* really is Shakespeare's last work—the play of *Henry VIII*, though possibly only in part by his hand, is certainly later—or that immediately after writing *The Tempest* he retired to Stratford. Yet we cannot deny that a kind of holiday mood pervades the end of *The Tempest*, more noticeably, indeed, in the words of Ariel, who is constantly growing merrier, than in those of Prospero. But what does this signify? Is it not the greatness of Shakespeare's art that it contains no trace of borrowed feeling, but springs throughout from the inmost experience of his own heart? What is there in this passage to distinguish it from others?

Some, again, have tried to show that what is generally considered to be Prospero's view of life and the world is



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Shakespeare's own conception. From the state of feeling which Masson styles the Romeo-Proteus-Biron mood he is said to have reached, by way of the Jaques-Hamlet and Coriolanus-Timon moods, the conception of Prospero. This question demands a more thorough treatment than it can receive within the limits of the present work. So much, however, may be said, that in the attempt to establish this evolutionary process the unconscious desire for an effective conclusion has been instrumental. It is quite possible that some elements of Prospero's mental conception may have been uppermost in Shakespeare's own mind also at the time when *The Tempest* was written. But as Shakespeare never wholly enters into his characters, as in every case only a part of his personality is contained in them, we cannot regard Prospero as an embodiment or symbolization of Shakespeare merely because his ripeness and serenity of mind may possibly reflect a part of Shakespeare's nature as it was at that time. It is surely an amazing piece of irony that critics seek to discover the greatest humorist the world has ever known precisely in that creation of his genius which is the least gifted with a sense of humour.

A more extensive and detailed interpretation sees in *The Tempest* not only a farewell which Shakespeare bids to the stage, but also a kind of settling of accounts between himself and the theatre. The Enchanted Island is the stage, Prospero is the poet himself, Ariel imagination, which must be kept under strict control in order to produce sound work, Miranda is the drama, Caliban the low populace whom the poet in vain tries to lift up to himself, because it proves itself incapable of education and accessible only to stimulation of the senses; Ferdinand is the poet Fletcher, Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian represent fellow-writers who have done Shakespeare ill turns. This conception was originally due to Dowden. But it too is without the slightest foundation of fact. We are too well acquainted with Shakespeare's philosophy not to cavil at the suggestion that he would ever have thought of embodying his idea of the imaginative faculty in the figure of an air-spirit. Nor do we ever in his works meet with expressions even remotely

258

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

suggesting the idea that imagination must be kept under control, or that genius, as Churton Collins (*Contemporary Review*, 1908, p. 65 *seq.*) says, is powerful only when controlled, and impotent in absolute licence. All these are reflections arising from speculations on the nature and soul of the artist in the nineteenth century which, however, were never dreamt of at the beginning of the seventeenth. As regards Caliban, there is not the slightest evidence that he was meant to represent the "groundlings." It is not easy to understand either why Shakespeare should have conceived his art in the image of a beautiful girl, viz., Miranda. Nowhere in his time do we find a similar personification of the dramatic productions of a playwright. Moreover, of all the female characters described in his works none would have been less fit to be made the emblem of an art which had always been obliged to appeal to the masses than a girl of tender years, untouched by any breath of the world, who has never set eyes upon a man. Shakespeare, with that habit of laughing at himself which appears in many of his remarks about poets and poetry, would certainly have been far more inclined to recommend to his critics for this allegorical purpose his Doll Tearsheet! And it is quite contrary to literary and historical probabilities to suppose that he would have recommended this art, upon his own departure, to the young Fletcher. The position of Fletcher in 1611 was anything but that of a pupil lending his master Shakespeare a helping hand. On the contrary, the younger dramatist by this time had acquired a renown by his pieces produced in collaboration with Beaumont which had begun to eclipse that of Shakespeare, and in all probability had even induced the latter to go in for a certain amount of imitation.<sup>1</sup>

Others have tried to find the personal connexions in another circle. As they believe *The Tempest* to have been composed for the celebration of the betrothal of Frederick—afterward the 'Winter King'—and the daughter of James I, they recognize in the picture of Prospero the King

<sup>1</sup> Thorndike, p. 50 *seq.* Author, *Shak. im lit. Urteil seiner Zeit*, p. 78 *seq.*

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

himself, seeing in the island princess the 'Winter Queen,' and in Ferdinand, who has come from the other side of the sea, the Count Palatine, Frederick V. This conception has been popularized, especially by the English literary historian Garnett (*Shak. Jahrb.*, xxxv), but in vain do we look for the shadow of a foundation for it. A striking parallel is seen in the fact that the wise father brings about the marriage; but how many marriages were contracted in that time that were not brought about by the parents? Then the motive of the play that Ferdinand is separated for a while from his people, who lament him as drowned—how else could he get to know Miranda?—is connected with the death of the King's eldest son, which had taken place shortly before the marriage, and it is praised as a supremely felicitous touch of Shakespeare's art that he has referred to the recent loss in such a tactful manner. But these events have next to nothing in common! Then again the resemblance between Prospero and James is based on quite featureless generalizations. "A wise, humane, peace-loving prince," it is said, "who attains his ends not by force, but by means of policy; devoted to far-sighted enterprises, which none but himself can realize, much less fathom [are we to suppose that the reunion of the Protestant and Catholic Churches, which was planned by James for a time, or his Spanish policy, is represented by Ariel's flights?]; independent of counsellors [?], in a secure position, fearing no enemies, and watching over all around him with his superior wisdom; holding back until the hour for decision had come and then successfully intervening; serving legitimate science, but the sworn enemy of the black art [?]: this is what James was in James's eyes and this is Prospero." We see that here already the expositor is forced to substitute for the real character of the King the ideal picture which he is alleged to have conceived of himself; but even then the equation is not complete. Nearly all the traits adduced are possessed already by the exiled prince in the Spanish tale or are evolved from the plot. Shakespeare has certainly not worked them into the play with a view to depicting James. Moreover, as Sir Sidney Lee has pointed out, a

260

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Court poet would not have acted very wisely in representing the King, who was very sensitive with respect to his title, as a prince who had been thrust from his throne. Lastly, Garnett's attempt to discover a serious warning addressed to the King in the description of Prospero's becoming estranged from his people through his studies shows the usual complete misunderstanding of Shakespeare's moral and social attitude.

Almost the same objections must be raised against the conception of *The Tempest* as a "drama of culture." What might at first sight incline us in favour of this view is the idea that in this play the question of the indigenous races is treated. It cannot be denied that in the Caliban action a number of typical incidents in the history of colonization are touched upon. The savage who takes the white man for a god, the enjoyment of alcoholic drink, the unsuccessful attempts at education, the anger due to the feeling of being dispossessed, are facts so well known from colonial history that because of them Caliban has been regarded as the representative of the disinherited natives, and Shakespeare's representation has been looked upon as the expression of his view that the native has proved himself incapable of education, has forfeited his rights, and himself forced the settlers to treat him as a slave.

This opinion, however, which was suggested by Gervinus (p. 221), is invalidated by the fact that Caliban is not a native at all, but a kind of fish-man. "Monster" and "servant-monster" are the terms of endearment used by his accomplices, and as apparently the fraternizing of this fantastic monster with the two merry drunkards had proved the most successful part of the whole play, we find Ben Jonson, in 1614, in the introduction to his *Bartholomew's Fair*, saying that there is no "servant-monster" in his play. Being a monster who began life as the son of the devil and a witch, Caliban cannot possibly be the representative of the natives. If Shakespeare had really wished, as even Sir Sidney Lee, to our great surprise, assumes (*Scribner's Magazine*, September 1907), to represent the native in his mentality, why then did he endow him with such an outward appearance

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

that the spectators no longer saw in him a native, but a monster? Lee explains this by saying that Shakespeare was perhaps unconsciously following the platonic idea that it is the soul which builds its own body; but we may well doubt whether his audience would have been able to grasp this almost 'expressionistic' subtlety of expressing the soul of a native by means of a monster's body. If Caliban has some things in common with the natives we must attribute this to the fact that Shakespeare utilized the freshly received information about men and conditions in the colonies as additional material. But if any fundamental conceptions could be gathered from *The Tempest* concerning the natives they would tend in the opposite direction to what has been maintained. When before the wandering shipwrecked crew there suddenly appears the ghostly banquet, and "several strange shapes" dance round it with inviting gestures, the good Gonzalo remarks:

If in Naples

I should report this now, would they believe me?

If I should say, I saw such islanders,—

For, certes, these are people of the island,—

Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet, note,

Their manners are more gentle-kind than of

Our human generation you shall find

Many, nay, almost any.

*Prospero* (aside).      Honest lord,

Thou hast said well; for some of you there present

Are worse than devils.

III, iii, 27

The friendly way in which supposed natives are spoken of here does not betray any preconceived aversion to them, rather the contrary. For the rest Shakespeare, here as in other cases of this kind, follows public opinion. Moreover, he had no desire to write a colonial drama. If, for instance, the attempt of Antonio and Sebastian to murder the sleeping King of Naples and his councillor is regarded as a symbolical representation of the quarrels which broke out among the settlers of the New World, the fact is altogether overlooked that this incident was very frequently used by the dramatist

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

in his other works. Neither does the colonial environment attract him, as Venice does in *The Merchant of Venice*. Though in *The Tempest* attention has been drawn to the employment of details taken from the reports of the historical shipwreck on the Bermudas, yet they do not strike the eye, being of minor importance and mixed with allusions to Shakespeare's nearer surroundings.

While Shakespeare is hailed by this class of expositors as a colonial politician, he appeals to others as the great student of nature and philosopher of culture. Caliban, according to Churton Collins (*Contemporary Review*, 1908), is humanity in evolution, the emergence of the primitive qualities from chaos. Caliban, exclaims Brandes (p. 958), is the type of prehistoric man, the first human inhabitant of the earth, the half-animal; Prospero, on the other hand, typifies the higher perfection of humanity, the man of the future, the superman! Caliban—this revelation comes from the American, Wilson—is the *missing link*, the transition from the anthropoid ape to primitive man. By this pronouncement he succeeds in ranking Shakespeare among the Darwinians, even among the Nietzscheans. But where do we find a word in Shakespeare's reflections indicating that he had anticipated the discovery of a later century which has taught us to see in the present juxtaposition of divergent forms the remains of a gradual evolution in different geological and historical epochs?

A great favourite with certain critics is also the *political conception*: Caliban as the representative of the masses, as the embodiment of the populace which is ever inclined to sedition. According to this view, which Renan too took for his point of departure in writing his Caliban drama, we see reflected in Caliban the soul of the masses who, as Kreyssig expresses it, in return for sensual enjoyment take the lowest for their master, kiss the feet of the drunkard that he may help them to slay the wise, are full of currish malice against persons of their own station, and also possessed of "the unfailing popular instinct for courage, which in the eyes of the multitude is the sole virtue of the ruler" (?). Now it is true that some of the essential and necessary

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

presuppositions for such a view are to be found in Shakespeare's anti-democratic way of thinking, which, however, was partly determined by literary tradition. Still, the expositor has absolutely no right to tear isolated traits and actions of a single character, which are fully in harmony with his peculiar individuality, away from their context in order to make the character appear a type of a sociological group, and then deduce from it the poet's general conceptions of life. It would be just as fair to regard Shylock as the representative of the Jewish race, and Falstaff as the type of the poor nobleman. But though Falstaff is a knight and Shylock a Jew, yet the poet does not use these characters for formulating his own views on the Jewish race and on the nobility. Furthermore, it is characteristic of the failure to understand the thoroughly individualistic nature of Shakespeare's art that the deep-searching wisdom of the expositors almost without an exception overlooks that side of Caliban which, as has been indicated, was certainly the most effective one, namely, the comic side, which usually afforded the audience, on seeing the drunken fish-man frustrated in his attempt to commit murder, a kind of pleasure similar to that aroused by the cheating of the devil.

Still less seriously can we take interpretations in which the action of *The Tempest* is explained as a symbol of the moral order of the world in the Christian sense (Collins) or of a new sociological order, in which Ariel represents active intelligence, Miranda symbolizes art, and the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand represents the penetration of art by morally purified force (Wolff). It is equally futile to explain the pregnant witch Sycorax as a cloud, Ariel, her prisoner, as lightning, Caliban, her child, as water, all of which taken together are to represent a thunderstorm (K. Meier), or to identify Ariel with electricity and Caliban with raw matter (Thümmel). Here interpretation becomes a game which, though it no longer possesses any importance for Shakespearean exegesis, may, if elevated into a method, furnish suggestions for a very pleasant drawing-room pastime.

A symbolical interpretation of *The Tempest* is therefore

## IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

altogether out of the question, both as regards the whole or single parts of the play. Those who have explained it in this manner forget the foundation of Shakespearean art which we have characterized above. Shakespeare's drama is never intended for such a small audience as would be required for an understanding of most of the allegorical meanings which the expositors elicit from *The Tempest*. In this connexion no great importance is to be attached to the fact that this piece was originally written for a private purpose, because it was soon transferred to the public stage which the poet was already aiming at while writing it. Neither can we find, as some have tried to do, a proof of the symbolical character of *The Tempest* in *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, which is really an allegorical poem written by Shakespeare. The lyric and the drama in that time have very few points of their evolution in common. The contents of the poem, its involved and artificial ornament, are explained by the tradition which rendered it intelligible and acceptable to the time. But where shall we find the allegorical tradition of which *The Tempest* forms part? Here too the end of our subject touches its beginning. Shakespeare's art does not consist in pointing out entirely new ways to the drama, as was done by Marlowe or Jonson, but in developing and making original contributions to what was already in existence. The symbolists will probably find it difficult to prove that Shakespeare was able to find suggestions of the alleged symbolism elsewhere, especially as Lilly's symbolical Court comedies are separated from *The Tempest* by a considerable space of time and have no connexion with it. This fact alone suffices to invalidate this assumption. More important, however, is the general disinclination of his art consciously to make the individual the bearer of super-individual traits. This circumstance has often escaped recognition. Thus the objection has been raised against *King Lear* that it is not the tragedy of old age. The tragic element contained in growing old is represented, according to Paul Ernst, by quite different things from the experience of ingratitude in a younger generation. But he who criticizes thus overlooks the fact



## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

that *King Lear* was never intended to be the tragedy of old age, any more than *Othello* was meant for tragedy of race. Gervinus in a similar manner has represented Shakespeare as a philosopher of history who goes in for practical politics ; he conceives, for example, in *Henry VIII* all the more important figures as representatives, intentionally chosen by the poet, of definite sociological groups. Such conceptions become possible only by doing violence to the obvious facts. Their final results would be to burden the poet with something which would drag him down to the perishable world in which his expositors dwell. For in art all things that are meant to serve only as a fair cloak for rigid doctrines quickly crumble to pieces ; but the human soul in it can never die.

## INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- ANGELO, 196-7, 199  
 Anne (*Richard III*), 113, 179  
 Antonio, 171, 184  
 Antony, Mark, 44, 73, 114, 117, 120  
   *seq.*  
 Arc, Joan of—*see* Joan of Arc  
 Ariel, 98-9, 134, 239-40, 251 *seq.*,  
   257, 258, 260, 264  
 BANGUO, 65, 75 *seq.*  
 Bertram, Count of Rousillon (*All's*  
   *Well that Ends Well*), 195-6  
 Bottom, 96-7  
 Brutus, 39-40, 42, 203  
 CÆSAR, Julius, 40 *seq.*, 126  
 Caliban, 134, 239-40, 253 *seq.*, 258-  
   259, 261 *seq.*  
 Canillo, 98 n.  
 Capulet, 132  
 Capulet, Lady, 94  
 Cassio, 206, 207 *seq.*  
 Cassius, 43, 44, 66-7  
 Claudius, King, 70, 172 *seq.*, 212, 228  
 Cleopatra, 43, 119 *seq.*, 227, 233-4  
 Cloten, 36  
 Cordelia, 38-9, 179 *seq.*, 224  
 Corioianus, 46, 53  
 Cressida, 39, 54 *seq.*  
 DESDEMONA, 128, 199, 208 *seq.*, 224,  
   248  
 Dogberry, 102  
 EDGAR, 60, 87, 191, 237  
 Edmund, 60 *seq.*, 81, 190-1  
 Enobarbus, 228  
 FALSTAFF, 32-3, 49, 90, 218, 221-2  
 Ferdinand (*The Tempest*), 246-7  
 Fool (*King Lear*), 85, 87  
 GERTRUDE, Queen, 85, 225-6  
 Gloucester, Earl of (*King Lear*), 181,  
   191, 199, 237  
 Goneril, 178, 182-3  
 Gremio, 110  
 HAMLET, 31-2, 67 *seq.*, 74, 100 *seq.*,  
   117-18, 147 *seq.*, 213 *seq.*, 225-  
   226, 235-6  
 Hamlet the elder, 38  
 Helena (*All's Well that Ends Well*),  
   195-6  
 Henry IV, 175  
 Henry V (Prince Hal), 39-40, 218  
   *seq.*  
 Horatio, 116-17, 170  
 Hotspur—*see* Percy, Henry  
 IAGO, 56, 60, 62 *seq.*, 81, 96, 200,  
   205 *seq.*, 228  
 JAQUES, 157, 168  
 Joan of Arc, 109-10  
 KATHARINE (*Henry VIII*), 184  
 Kent, 87, 181 *seq.*  
 LAERTES, 67-8, 104-5, 168, 186  
 Laurence, Friar, 94  
 Lear, King, 34-5, 87, 94, 165 n.,  
   166, 176 *seq.*, 225  
 Leontes, 95-6, 198 n.  
 MACBETH, 71 *seq.*, 94-5, 116-17, 138,  
   166, 203, 227 *seq.*  
 Macbeth, Lady, 36, 71, 83-4, 116-  
   117, 200, 227 *seq.*  
 Macduff, 95, 144 *seq.*  
 Malcolm, 144 *seq.*  
 Malvolio, 102  
 Mariana (*Measure for Measure*), 197  
   198  
 Marullus, 90  
 Mercutio, 97 *seq.*  
 ✓ Miranda, 244 *seq.*, 258 *seq.*, 264  
 ✓ OCTAVIUS, 128  
 Oliver, 60 *seq.*  
 Ophelia, 67 *seq.*, 85-6, 171-2, 225  
 Orlando, 60-1  
 Othello, 63 *seq.*, 66-7, 73, 94, 114-15,  
   248

## CHARACTER PROBLEMS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| PERCY, Henry (Hotspur), 93                                   | Romeo, 55, 248                                    |
| Perdita, 246   | Rosalind, 49                                      |
| Polixenes, 198 n.  | Rousillon, Count of— <i>see</i> Bertram,          |
| Polonius, 99 <i>seq.</i>                                     | Count of Rousillon                                |
| Portia ( <i>Julius Cæsar</i> ), 229                          |   |
| Prospero, 38, 115, 239, 242 <i>seq.</i> ,<br>253 <i>seq.</i> | SHALLOW, Justice, 102, 221                        |
|  | Shylock, 15, 87 <i>seq.</i> , 118-19, 204-<br>205 |
| REGAN, 178, 182-3  |   |
| Richard II, 52, 74, 170-1                                    | TITANIA, 96                                       |
| Richard III, 73, 81, 113, 179, 206,<br>228                   | Titus Andronicus, 178                             |
| Roderigo, 96, 208  | Troilus, 54 <i>seq.</i> , 106 n., 134             |
|  | Tubal, 118-19                                     |

# CHARACTER PROBLEMS

- LANDSBERG, Gertrud**, 68-9, 100 n.,  
 134 n., 148 n.  
**Lee, Sir Sidney**, 201-2  
**Lenbach**, 201  
**Lessing**, 8  
**Lewis, Ch. M.**, 151 n., 151  
**Lilly, John**, 97  
**Löning, 68**, 100-5 seq., 153 n., 173,  
 214  
**Luce, M.**, 15, 134 n.  
**Ludwig, O.**, 15  
  
**MACCALLUM, E. W.**, 41, 42 n., 117,  
 133, 138, 142, 143  
**Mackenzie, Compton**, 56  
**Mackenzie, Henry**, 153 n.  
**Manning, J.**, 13  
**Marlowe**, 14-15, 88 seq., 265  
**Marston, John**, 16, 17, 153 and n.,  
 165, 17  
**Massinger, Philip**, 10 n.  
**Masson, D.**, 258  
**Meier, K.**, 253 n., 264  
**Montague**, 250  
**Mun, J.**, 165  
**Mut**, 50  
  
**NHE, Thomas**, 214  
**Nth, Sir Thomas**, 120, 142 n.  
  
**VERBURY, Sir Thomas**, 154 seq.,  
 198  
**Ovid**, 115  
  
**PEELE, George**, 12  
**Perott, J. de**, 239 n.  
**Pescetti**, 50  
**Plutarch**, 37 seq., 120 seq.  
**Pooler, Ch. K.**, 119  
  
**RADEBRECHT**, 153 n., 160 n., 170 n.  
**Raleigh, Sir Walter**, 7, 74, 94, 192  
**Renan**, 263  
**Rhys, E.**, 177 n.  
  
**Rodin, Auguste**, 201  
**Rümelin**, 27-8, 107-8, 11  
 178-9, 191, 193, 228  
  
**SAXO GRAMMATICUS**, 100,  
**Schiller**, 7, 73, 113  
**Schlegel**, 22, 93, 98  
**Sheridan**, 8  
**Siburg, Bruno**, 72  
**Sidney, Sir Philip**, 190  
**Sonnenthal**, 108  
**Spenser, Edmund**, 189  
**Spingarn, J. E.**, 87  
**Steevens, George**, 116 n.  
**Stoll, E. E.**, 26, 153, 169, 1  
**Suetonius**, 49  
**Symons, Arthur**, 126  
**Synge, J. M.**, 177  
  
**TATLOCK, John S. P.**, 251  
**Thackeray**, 232  
**Thorndike, A. H.**, 248-9,  
**Thümmel**, 158 n., 264  
**Tolstoi**, 87, 88, 191  
**Tourneur, Cyril**, 16, 178 n.  
**Türk**, 167  
  
**ULRICI**, 15, 74, 81, 82, 2  
  
**VISCHER, Fr. Th.**, 61, 7  
 96, 106, 112, 118, 127,  
 209, 214, 229  
**Volkelt**, 57  
  
**WALZEL**, 135-6  
**Wann, L.**, 10 n.  
**Wetz**, 36, 61, 209, 234  
**Whetstone, George**, 196  
**Wilson, D.**, 263  
**Wolff, M. J.**, 36-7, 56-7, 8  
 136, 138, 210, 220,  
 256, 264  
**Wüllner, L.**, 244

## INDEX OF NAMES

- ANZENGRUBER**, 92-3  
**Ayrer**, Jacob, 239, 251  
**Ayres**, H. M., 50
- BARKER**, Granville, 95  
**Beaumont**, 10 n., 16, 21, 25, 54, 139, 140, 197, 248 *seq.*, 259  
**Belleforest**, 149  
**Bernhardt**, Sarah, 164  
**Bieber**, G. A., 152 n.  
**Boas**, F. S., 142  
**Boccaccio**, 22, 195, 196, 198  
**Bradley**, A. C., 116 n., 153 n., 158 n., 169, 180, 185, 199, 201, 206, 211, 223, 226, 230  
**Brandes**, Georg, 9, 25-6, 41 *seq.*, 56, 65, 73, 74, 89-90, 126, 135, 138, 141, 179, 206, 207, 214, 219, 263  
**Brandl**, A., 115  
**Brie**, Fr., 106 n.  
**Browning**, Robert, 35 n., 201  
**Buckle**, H. Th., 106  
**Burton**, Robert, 165  
**Byron**, 37
- CHAPMAN**, George, 155-6  
**Chaucer**, 111  
**Chesterfield**, Philip, Earl of, 93  
**Cicero**, 156  
**Cinthio**, 63  
**Coleridge**, S. T., 206, 210  
**Collins**, Churton, 259, 263  
**Conrad**, H., 105  
**Craig**, W. J., 177 n.  
**Creizenach**, 10 n., 24 n., 148 n., 194, 199 n., 200  
**Crosby**, E., 186  
**Cunningham**, H., 74, 79, 82, 84, 95
- DANTE**, 7  
**Davenant**, Sir William, 251  
**Dekker**, Thomas, 16, 139, 140, 160, 197  
**Dempewolf**, W., 92 n.  
**Devrient**, Edward, 106  
**Dowden**, E., 115, 158 n., 185, 258  
**Drake**, N., 240
- Drummond of Hawththuden**, 13  
**Dryden**, 251  
**Dyce**, A., 109
- EBNER-ESCHENBACH**, M., 81  
**Eckermann**, 119  
**Ernst**, Paul, 265
- FIELDING**, Henry, 201  
**Fischer**, Kuno, 118, 147, 167  
**Fletcher**, 10 n., 16, 21, 25, 139, 140, 197, 248 *seq.*, 258, 259  
**Forman**, Simon, 13  
**Friesen**, von, 75, 77  
**Furness**, H. H., 153 n., 198
- GARNETT**, E., 260  
**Geoffrey of Monmouth**, 177 n.  
**Gervinus**, 73-4, 118, 147, 206, 266  
**Gessner**, 253  
**Goethe**, 93, 119, 163, 215, 257  
**Greene**, Robert, 14  
**Grillparzer**, 112, 140, 176, 202
- HALL**, J., 198  
**Hart**, H. C., 109  
**Hauptmann**, Gerhard, 19  
**Hazlitt**, 22  
**Heywood**, Thomas, 25, 197  
**Holinshed**, 73  
**Hugo**, Victor, 147
- IBSEN**, 8, 14, 113
- JOHNSON**, Samuel, 22, 95  
**Jonson**, Ben, 10, 16, 17, 22, 87, 157, 202, 261, 265
- KILIAN**, 29-30  
**Klein**, D., 87  
**Koch**, Max, 242  
**Kreyssig**, 39, 56, 74, 75, 98, 127, 129, 131, 133, 179, 183, 184-5, 214, 219-20, 228, 240, 257, 263  
**Kyd**, Thomas, 13, 69, 148 *seq.*, 154, 170, 178

